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# E for Efficiency

By PETER B. KYNE

THE Mumfords were Maine men who commenced their sailing in small boats of their own manufacture after school let out. Indeed, they dwelt in an atmosphere of ships, for the little town in which they had lived two hundred years had grown up around two shipbuilding plants, and Bowditch on navigation and Nichols on seamanship were elective courses in the local high school.

When Dan Mumford finished high school at sixteen the call of the sea was as loud in his young ears as ever it had been in those of any Mumford; so he shipped as a foremast hand out of Bangor on a six-legged schooner laden with lumber for Havana. At eighteen he was third mate; fourteen months later he went to second; an experience of a year and he was first mate.

Shortly after the United States declared war on Germany and when Dan Mumford was twenty-two years old, he achieved the ambition of his clan. He had a ticket as master of sail, any ocean and any tonnage, and for steam vessels up to five hundred tons net register. And the sailing ship era was drawing to a close.

The squareriggers were gone; from the Pacific Coast the lumber hookers had

disappeared, sold for trading schooners in the South Seas or laid up in Rotten Row. And while the five- and six-masted schooners continued to sail out of Maine ports, their numbers were dwindling rapidly; as they were lost or relegated to Rotten Row no new ships of their kind were built to replace them.

However, Dan Mumford had not arrived on the scene too late to miss his postgraduate course—a voyage in a bark around Cape Horn to San Francisco, to the Orient, to Australia, to Liverpool and back to Bath.

"And now," he said to himself, when the inspectors handed him his master's ticket, "for steam."

The War furnished him with his opportunity. The sudden excess of shipping requirements resulted in more ships than the dwindling supply of licensed officers could man at the outbreak of the war. Dan Mumford would have preferred a commission in the Naval Reserve Force, but unfortunately early an unauthorized acquaintance with a buzz-saw had cost him the first joints of three fingers of his left hand; so he shipped out as second mate on a trans-Atlantic freighter.

Just before the Armistice he was given command of a poky thirty-five hundred-ton iron steamer of ancient vintage; but the pride of his first command was lowered by a German submarine and he went back to chief officer on a freighter running to South American ports, while waiting for his star to rise again. The deflation period of 1921 brought a sudden ruinous drop in freights, however, and Dan Mumford found himself on the beach. So he decided to go home and see what had happened to the old town since first he put to sea.

HE FOUND at a local yard an eighty-five-foot schooner yacht just nearing completion for a Pacific Coast shipping man, to whom a telegraphed application resulted in an engagement to bring the yacht around to San Francisco for him. Dan made a smashing voyage and delivered the craft without accident; and when Johnny Hickman, her owner, came down to look his new toy over, he saw Dan Mumford's ticket screwed into the wall of the little chartroom. It was an unlimited license for sail or steam now.

He looked the big skipper over humorously.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-six, sir."

"How long have you held a master's ticket?"

"Five years, sir. Master of steam once, for two weeks. The job blew up off the Irish coast. Torpedo."

Johnny Hickman grinned.

"Your accent and the speed you made bringing my yacht around would indicate that you have inherited the tradition that it is sinful to shorten sail in dirty weather."

"I did take the spinnaker, the topsails and the fisherman's staysail off her once with the wind on my quarter. Her sticks were bending and I was afraid I'd put a permanent bow in them. And in a hurricane in the Gulf of Tehuantapec I had to strip her down to the forestaysail, but I didn't heave her to. She ran before it like a greyhound. She's a dry boat and a sweetheart in light airs."

"How would you like a permanent job skippering her?"

"Thanks, but I'm not that kind of sailor. Blue water for mine."

"Very well, you shall have it. Listen to me, Captain. During the War the Emergency Fleet Corporation, for no reason that anybody has ever been able to discover, built a great fleet of wooden coasting steamers. Heaven knows what they're good for. I don't. They depart radically from the accepted design for lumber freighters on this coast and their boilers and engines spell one word—grief. And they have been built of unseasoned timber, which means that they'll be punk in five years.

"There're fifty or sixty of them tied up along the Columbia River and in Lake Union, at Seattle. Half a dozen had work abandoned on them before the engines, boilers and tanks were installed or the house completed, and I have purchased one of these for a song I sang myself. I've built rather a nice cuddy aft and rigged her as a schooner. I can operate her cheaply—master, two mates, bosun, five A. B's and the cook—and seamen's wages have gone to glory

because of the present shipping slump.

"She'll carry two million feet of lumber foreign, and I can operate her at a profit, even at the current freights, until it becomes necessary to spend money on repairs. Then I'll sell her for what I can get as a barge on San Francisco Bay."

"My wages," said Dan Mumford, "have not gone to glory—not for skippering that sort of maritime monstrosity. How do you know the brute can sail?"

"That," said the urbane Mr. Hickman, "is something we'll have to find out."

"I know now she'll not. A sailing ship model is a sailing ship model and a steamship model is a steamship model. They won't point up. They'll go to leeward and break your heart."

"You're young enough and tough enough to survive a broken heart."

"Put a Swede or a Finn in that berth, Mr. Hickman, and give me a job on one of your steamers. I understand Hickman & Son operate a dozen vessels—half of them running to the Orient and half Intercoastal. Really, sir, I'm solid and reliable."

"I prefer to find that out for myself. I'm not averse to giving you your chance in steam, but since, in a moment of foolishness, I decided to gamble with what you term a maritime monstrosity, I've got to find a skipper to get me out whole. And, of course, the skipper who could do that would be apt to find a weak spot in my stern nature."

"I'll think it over," said Dan Mumford. "Frankly, the job does not appeal to me. I'll let you know in the morning."

THE following morning he came up to the office of Hickman & Son, resolved to tell Johnny Hickman he would not accept the berth. A clerk in the general office showed him into the office of Hickman's secretary, who bade him be seated, took his name and informed him that Mr. Hickman would see him in a few minutes.

She gave him a quick, appraising glance before attacking her typewriter again—which, of course, afforded Dan Mumford opportunity to appraise her at his leisure. He cleared his throat, which suddenly had become constricted.

"Have you worked for Mr. Hickman very long, miss?" he queried.

"A year and a half, Captain."

"Expect to continue working for him indefinitely?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"He wants me to skipper a ship for him. Is he a pretty nice man to work for?"

"He is. Very kind and thoughtful and generous."

"What's his father like?"

"His father is dead. Mr. Johnny is the sole owner."

A buzzer sounded.

"Mr. Hickman will see you now. Go right in that door," the girl directed him.

"Well, young feller-m'-lad," Johnny Hickman greeted him briskly, "have you come to a decision?"

"Yes, sir. I've decided that a skipper who can't come to a quick decision will never walk the bridge of a Hickman steamship. I'll take over command of your man killer."

Johnny Hickman threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"What caused you to change your mind? Broke?"

"And you ask that of a Yankee? No, sir. It's that trim little craft out in the adjoining room. I like her lines and yearn to command her."

And Dan Mumford grinned his boyish grin. Frank he was, independent, a young devil who would take a chance—and those who didn't like that could jump overboard. Johnny Hickman's heart warmed to him for his audacity. However, Mr. Hickman possessed mischievous tendencies himself, so he was moved to put a shot below Dan Mumford's waterline.

"I'm afraid you're out of luck, Captain. She's engaged and is leaving my employ presently."

"Strange," Dan Mumford murmured. "She told me she expected to work here indefinitely. I asked her. Had to find out, before deciding to come to work for you. Had to know her latitude and longitude."

"Kid," said Johnny Hickman, "you're a bully boy with a crockery eye. I'm

for you and you can count on my support. Her name is Nellie E. Landon and her father's my port captain. I imagine they'd both prefer a seafaring man."

"I suppose you let her have an hour for luncheon."

"Two hours—when you're in port."

"You're even more kind and thoughtful than she said you were."

"Hold everything. Many a weary day will pass ere Jack comes home again."

Dan Mumford nodded and sighed deeply.

"Well, to business, sir. Where's my ship, what's her name, where do I load and where do I discharge?"

"Your ship is being rigged at Stone's shipyard, across the bay in Oakland. I haven't fixed on her name as yet, but I'll do so this afternoon and telephone the shipyard to carve it on her stern. She lies on the marine railway having her bottom copper sheathed. I have a suspicion she'll be in tropical waters longer than she ought to be so I'm guarding against worms. You must have her ready for sea in two weeks because you'll tow to Humboldt Bay behind one of my little coasting steamers and load a cargo of redwood lumber for delivery at Sydney. You'll be paid two hundred and fifty dollars a month. On your way, boy. You have much to do."

Dan Mumford stood up, prepared to go.

"It's nice to scatter little seeds of kindness as we go through life, sir. Would I be presuming if I suggested you name this craft *Nellie E. Landon?*"

"No." Johnny Hickman laughed. "Clear out and attend to it."

On his way out Dan Mumford paused in the secretary's office.

"I wonder," he said, "if you could get me the manager of Stone's shipyard on the telephone."

"Certainly."

HIS wishes having been complied with, he spoke thusly into that telephone:

"Hickman & Son speaking —Captain Mumford. I am to command that crossbred schooner you have on the ways. A name for her has been decided upon. She will be called *Nellie E. Landon,* and see that you carve it deep in letters of gold across her noble transom. Got it? . . . Thank you."

He stood a moment gazing down into Nellie Landon's beaming face.

"How sweet of Mr. Hickman to name a ship after his secretary," she declared. "I'm frightfully complimented."

Said Dan Mumford:

"Give credit where credit is due. The idea was entirely mine."

She stared at him in silent amazement.

"And I have additional good news for you, Miss Landon," he went on. "Whenever I'm in port you are to have two hours for luncheon, only I'm to select the days this boon is operative. Personally, I'm hungry right now, but as I am a stranger in this city I must ask you to select a good restaurant and lead me to it."

"But I do not even know you, you—you big thing with a way about you."

"Quite true. I'm Dan Mumford, master of the fast and commodious schooner *Nellie E. Landon,* of San Francisco, and I expect to remain in the Hickman employ indefinitely. I hope you'll make up your mind to get used to me."

"You're very bold."

"It runs in the Mumford blood like false whiskers. Opportunity knocks once at every man's door. If unheeded —" He shrugged his big shoulders. "Please," he added with boyish insouciance. "It's very lonely at sea. The mate will probably be deeply religious, the second mate is bound to play an accordion very badly and the cook, like all marine cooks, will be crazy as a tin canned dog. And I'll be suspicious of the chronometer and my canaries will probably start moulting and refuse to sing. Probably you do not know it, but all respectable sailing ship masters have canaries, a cat and a dog."

His eyes lighted with a brilliant idea; he flashed his strong white teeth.

"In two hours we can lunch and buy the canaries. In the matter of seagoing canaries I'd be afraid to trust my own judgment."

Nellie's silvery laugh was to him as the singing of the seraphim. She rose and closed down her desk.

"You win, Skipper Mumford. You're

perilously close to being fresh but you're *not* impertinent."

"I hope your parents will like me," he answered gravely. "Thank you very much for being so nice to me. While I'm at sea I'll build you a model of the *Nellie E. Landon* in a bottle, and if I can pick up a whale's tooth somewhere I'll scrimshank it for you with an appropriate design."

"You're so kind, Captain. Promise me you'll not come home with a cursing parrot on your wrist and a gold ring in your ear. And I do hope, so fervently, you'll never have the American flag tattooed on your breast. I loathe tattooed men."

"You might as well know the worst right now. On my left forearm may be seen the portrait of a lady I met in Cape Town. It's a work of art, however."

Nellie Landon looked him over very soberly while she pulled on her hat.

"We will permit the dead past to bury itself," she said.

Whereupon the transported Daniel executed a few steps of a sailor's hornpipe, cracked his tremendous knuckles and sang softly:

"Rolling home, rolling home,
Rolling home, across the sea.
Rolling home to Nellie Landon,
Rolling home, dear girl, to thee."

"Come," commanded Nellie. "This is a business office. I do believe you think you can ride horseback, too!"

THE succeeding two weeks were very busy ones for Dan Mumford. He spent them at the shipyard inspecting the *Nellie E. Landon's* standing and running rigging, making up lists of sundry spare equipment he required, bending and stretching the sails, testing the plumbing and superintending the color scheme of the painting. While the *Nellie E. Landon* was on the marine railway he walked around and under her several times and was observed to shake his head and murmur, "Tch! Tch! Tch!"

Finally the shipyard finished with her and slipped her back into the drink, whereupon a tug towed her out into the bay and swung her repeatedly while her compass was being adjusted. She was then towed to a dock in San Francisco, where Johnny Hickman's port captain, father of the adorable Nellie, furnished him with a crew; the port steward had already purchased and now delivered provisions for the voyage; Dan Mumford took on water and two canaries and Nellie gave him a cat.

In the city pound he purchased for two dollars a large dog of variegated ancestry. Then he called at a nautical instrument shop and rescued his stop watch which he had there to be regulated—also the chronometer which had been rated, supplied himself with charts and a copy of "British Admiralty Notes", phoned Johnny Hickman he would be ready to tow out with the tide at five o'clock next morning—and spent his last evening ashore with Nellie Landon at dinner and the theater.

At parting he said he would cable her from Sydney and, upon observing that Nellie did not seem to regard this as at all unusual or extravagant, he took heart of hope and told her he loved her. Of course, he'd only known her two weeks, but—

Nellie was neither coy nor flirtatious.

"I suspected that might be the case, Dan," she said simply, "and I'm glad you mentioned it. Indeed, I think I'd have cried if you hadn't."

This avowal occurred in front of the apartment house where the Landons lived. Noticing now a dark alley which led to the tradesmen's entrance, Dan Mumford convoyed Nellie therein, took her in his arms and kissed her. And Nellie wept and murmured a number of times:

"Oh, Dan, dear, I love you. Do take care of yourself."

This was the first time a woman had ever wept over him; it made him feel very holy toward Nellie and he fled abruptly to hide his own youthful emotion. As he leaped aboard the *Nellie E. Landon* half an hour later he felt like a second Alexander and everything was changed. Even the *Nellie E. Landon's* straight steamer stem and short stern were beautiful to him and ere he drifted off to sleep he forgot to tell himself that she'd probably roll his eyeballs out, that, heavy laden, she'd take the seas over her forecastle head and probably rob

him of his deckload; when his cur dog kissed his hand he wanted to kiss the cur dog. Aye, God was in His heaven and all was well with the world!

When Nellie brought the mail in to Johnny Hickman the next morning the latter said casually:

"Miss Landon, I have always maintained that women are better judges of character than men. I've been a little worried about giving that ship to Captain Mumford. He has a very pleasant address, but on second thought it seems to me he's very young and a trifle—er—flippant, unsteady, not quite solid. What's your idea about the fellow?"

"I think this about him, Mr. Hickman," the girl replied with just a note of asperity in her voice. "If he ever gets back with that hearse you've sent him to sea in, I've decided I'm going to marry him."

Johnny Hickman gazed piously upward.

"Oh, Death, where is thy sting?" he murmured. "Oh, Grave, where is thy victory?"

"I wish you'd think well of him, Mr. Hickman. He's wonderful."

"He's the eighth wonder of the world, Nellie. Don't cry. He'll get back. That big pup would fight his way through anything. He'd wade neck deep through bearcats and spot them all three bites each. I merely wanted to find out what you thought of him. None of my business, of course, but in this case it was important. I had to make certain the young fellow has common sense."

TWO months later Nellie entered Johnny Hickman's office and laid upon his desk a letter from Dan Mumford.

"He enclosed it in a letter he sent me. Down close to Hawaii a homebound O. & O. steamer was going to pass him a mile to starboard, so he flew a distress signal and she stopped. Then Dan sent the ship's boat over to her with an envelop addressed to me and asked the steamship skipper to mail it when he reached San Francisco."

The letter to Johnny Hickman read as follows:

Dear Mr. Hickman: The *Nellie E. Landon* will not sail within ten points of the eye of the wind. In fact, the flat bottomed brute isn't a sailer. She's a sidler. Of course you have her insured and the owners of the cargo probably have their lumber insured, but it occurs to me you haven't got your freight money insured! Remember you have to deliver cargo before you can collect the freight on it. Lloyd's of London will insure anything. They will bet you I do get to Sydney and deliver this cargo and collect the freight money, or they will bet you I do not. You pay your money and take your choice.

I have to pass between too many islands and buck too many strong currents with this experiment of yours, and my judgment tells me that a ship that sails crab-fashion when she isn't running before the wind ought to have auxiliary power to claw off a lee shore.

The Lord only knows when I shall return —if ever.

Your broken hearted skipper,

—DANIEL P. MUMFORD

"The traditions of the wind-ship men are in this fellow's bones, Nellie. His job is to skipper the *Nellie E. Landon,* and yet he's worrying about the freight money and risking dismissal by giving me free advice. Stops a steamer by hoisting a false signal of distress to get word to me. I'll bet that steamship skipper gave him a proper cursing out. Well, I'm going to take his advice."

Four months later Johnny Hickman received the following letter from the Consolidated-Australian Steamship Company:

Hickman & Son,
220 California Street,
San Francisco, Calif.

Gentlemen: We enclose herewith a bill for $645.32 for provisions furnished your schooner *Nellie E. Landon* at sea on the 14th inst. She was flying a distress signal and was sighted by our S. S. *Wanganui* one hundred miles off the coast of New Guinea. As the *Nellie E. Landon* did not put off a boat the *Wanganui* did. Your master, Captain Daniel P. Mumford, informed the mate that he was one hundred and fifty-seven days out from Humboldt Bay, that he had run short of provisions and that the few stores he had left had been ruined by salt water. His vessel's seams had opened and she was very low in the water and down by the head, having lost a large part of her deck load aft. Captain Mumford expected to lose the forward portion at an early date but seemed quite cheerful about it. Having an underdeck cargo of lumber, he knew he would not sink. Both his lifeboats had been smashed beyond repair.

The attached bill carries the O.K. of Cap-

tain Mumford and we would be obliged for your check to cover. Your captain asked for bird seed, which we regret we were unable to furnish. Inasmuch as Captain Mumford desired to send some letters but had no writing material he appended two brief messages on the back of the enclosed bill and, doubtless, they are intelligible to you.

Yours very truly,

—E. P. GLENN
General Manager

On the reverse of the bill Johnny Hickman read:

I hate you. I love her. Things are so tough with me my canaries are singing bass.

—MUMFORD

"What a remarkable man," said Johnny Hickman, and delivered to Nellie that portion of the roundabout message he could not use.

The following month he received a cablegram from Port Moresby, in New Guinea. It read:

PILED UP BARRIER REEF TOTAL LOSS NO CASUALTIES EXCEPT CANARIES DEAD INDIGESTION AND CAT WHICH CLIMBED MASTHEAD REFUSED COME DOWN MADE BOAT FROM LUMBER IN HOLD TOUGH VOYAGE HERE ALL HANDS RETURNING STEAMER *CALEDONIA* LOVE TO NELLIE

—MUMFORD

Johnny Hickman summoned Nellie and silently handed her the cablegram. Nellie beamed, then her face clouded.

"I suppose this will cost him his ticket," she choked. "And, whether it does or not, he's out of a job."

Hickman knew what she was thinking. Her marriage to Dan Mumford was to be delayed. Yielding now to a congenital spirit of mischief, he said gravely:

"I doubt if he'll lose his ticket. He'll prove by the crew and the course he's sailed that the Nellie was a sidler, not a sailer, and when he got in a stiff current and the wind failed he couldn't claw off the Barrier Reef. As for his job, I'll manage that. I like that young fellow; he has courage and a sense of humor. He knew that crossbred schooner was likely to put a blot on his maritime record, but he took a chance. I'm going to buy a steamer for him."

Nellie, acting for Dan Mumford, thanked him feelingly.

WHEN Dan and his crew returned, the skipper noted his protest and the Supervising Inspector of Hulls and Boilers at San Francisco made an official investigation into the loss of the *Nellie E. Landon* and exculpated him from blame; the insurance was collected, Johnny Hickman cast up his accounts and found himself three thousand dollars on the right side of the ledger. He sent for Dan Mumford.

"Well, Captain, I haven't any opening for you in a big steamer, but for Miss Landon's sake, if not for your own, I'm going to provide a berth for you. I'm going to buy another of those Shipping Board wooden vessels—"

"No more sidlers, sir," Dan interrupted firmly.

"Of course not. I've had a man rooting around in that wooden fleet at Lake Union and have made a discovery. One of them is equipped with excellent triple-expansion engines and Scotch boilers, which means that I can readily secure an engine room crew. Remember, they're going to scrap this great fleet and I can buy this steamer for six thousand dollars. I'll do it, just to give you the job of skippering her."

"Sold!"

"You need experience in steam, Captain, and this is a cheap way of supplying it. A couple of years in this cheap 'un and I'll give you the first vacancy in a real steamship."

So Johnny Hickman purchased the *Pacific Trader* from the Shipping Board and sent Dan Mumford to Yokohama in her with a cargo of canned fruit. Owing to the fact that his savings were still too meager for matrimony, Nellie and Dan decided to defer their marriage for a year; Dan thought, too, it would be well to entrench himself still further in his employer's affections before taking such an important step.

The next they heard of Dan Mumford was a radiogram from him to the effect that he had just gone ashore off the coast of Japan and that the prospects of saving the *Pacific Trader* were extremely nebulous.

Nellie Landon's heart broke when her employer laid that fateful message on her desk.

"Seems to be a jinks on that boy," he comforted her. "He's had three berths as master and has lost all three ships. Of course, the loss of the *Pacific Trader* is not much of a blow to me. I had her insured to the limit, and if the shippers didn't insure their cargo that's their funeral. I do hope Mumford will have, for the inspectors, a tale that will pass muster, although I'm afraid. He commanded a steamship this time and, unless his engines broke down, the loss of his vessel will be ascribed to somebody's faulty seamanship. Meanwhile, in the hope that his radio is still in working order, send him this message:

SORRY FOR YOUR BAD LUCK STOP IN CIRCUMSTANCES YOU ARE MY ONLY WORRY STOP BUCK UP AND DO BEST YOU CAN STOP LOVE FROM NELLIE

—HICKMAN

"Oh, Mr. Hickman," Nellie sobbed, "you're so kind."

"I greatly fear my kindness, in this case, has backfired."

As events demonstrated subsequently, it had. Dan came home with his crew, noted his protest and, in due course, appeared with his mates for trial before the inspectors. The second mate had been on watch for three hours before the vessel struck but the captain had been on the bridge with him all that time; hence, in the unanimous opinion of the inspectors, the loss of the *Pacific Trader* was ascribed to faulty judgment and poor seamanship on the part of the master; so the mate was acquitted and Dan Mumford had his license revoked for two years.

When the sentence was promulgated he was, of course, broken hearted. He had expected to be convicted, but he had not looked forward to such a severe punishment. It constituted a blot on his record he knew he would never live down; even with his license restored at the end of two years he knew he would have extreme difficulty securing a berth as third mate, for masters would be afraid to trust him alone on the bridge.

"Nellie," he told the girl huskily, "I'm afraid ours will be a long engagement. I think you'd better set me down, too. A sailor is no good on the beach, and a beachcomber is no good to you."

"I'll not give you up," Nellie declared firmly. "Put your pride in your pocket and go in and see my father. He's the port captain. Tell him you want a berth in the forecastle of a Hickman ship. I'll wait two years for you, darling, and when you've got your ticket back we'll see if your luck has turned."

"Well, I've been aloft before. I can do it again," he answered, and a week later went out as boatswain on a Hickman ship on the Intercoastal run.

MEANWHILE Nellie Landon had asked for and received a transcript of the stenographic report of Dan's trial. She read it carefully, thought over various aspects of it for a week—and sent a cablegram to the Hickman Steamship Company's agent in Yokohama. It was a long cablegram and cost her almost a month's salary.

Upon his return from the Atlantic Coast Dan took luncheon with Nellie in a cheap restaurant across the Embarcadero from the dock where his ship was lying.

"We'll have to eat in a hurry, Nellie," he informed her. "We're working cargo and I'll have to be back in forty-five minutes."

"Nothing of the sort, sweetheart," Nellie retorted. "If the daughter of the port captain can not exercise a little influence, who can? My father has told your mate that you are to have the afternoon off. The inspectors want to see you. After you've interviewed them, come down to the office and see me. Mr. Hickman wants to see you, also."

Dan Mumford's troubled eyes shone with a new hope.

"I wonder what they want of me now, Nellie?"

"Mr. Hickman thinks they have reconsidered your sentence and may reduce it somewhat, if you have a further interview with them, Dan."

An hour later Dan Mumford faced the Supervising Inspector of Hulls and

Boilers.

"Captain," the latter began, "we have given some further consideration to your case and as a result have come to the conclusion that the circumstances scarcely warranted a two-year suspension of your license. We overlooked an obscure point in your favor, but inasmuch as you overlooked it yourself, possibly you will not blame us for that."

"To err—" Dan Mumford grinned—"is human. To forgive, divine."

"You piled the *Pacific Trader* up on Ichibu Saki Shoals off the entrance to Yokohama harbor. Now, in approaching that harbor from the east the sailing directions, as laid down in the book, are very explicit. When you pick up the light on Ichibu Saki and it is on your starboard bow, you turn directly south for twenty miles to give the shoals a wide berth and avoid the set of a very strong inshore current.

"You admit you knew this, yet you did not do it. You picked up the light, but you thought it was a light farther up the coast. Ichibu Saki light is white, with a fifteen-second flash. For two days and nights you had not been able to get a sight and so you were running by dead reckoning and against a heavy head sea. Nevertheless, according to all the testimony, your dead reckoning was pretty accurate and both you and your mates had confidence in it until you picked up the light, for which you had been looking for half the night.

"But it was a white light, with a six-second flash. This confused you, because there is no light on that coast with a six-second flash. You and the second mate both timed it with your stopwatches, and you got it in six seconds while the mate timed it in seven. Then you didn't pick the light up again for ten minutes, so you put your vessel under a slow bell and waited. You caught it again in seven seconds and the mate caught it in six. Then you lost it for ten minutes more."

"As I testified," said Dan Mumford, "we were lucky to pick it up at all. There was a thick, soft, mushy snow falling and you know, sir, that the beam of the most powerful light is hard to pick up in such weather."

"Exactly. That is the point to which we all failed to give mature consideration—all but a Miss Landon who is, I believe, Mr. Hickman's secretary and a daughter of Jim Landon, Hickman's port captain. The failure of yourself and mate; Johnny Hickman, experienced in shipping; Jim Landon, an old shipmaster, and ourselves, to consider this phenomenon, lends considerable strength to the old saying that sometimes there is such a thing as being too close to your job—so close to the woods you can not see the trees. However, to continue:

"Five times you and the second mate picked up that light within the hour—and always it was a very faint six or seven-second flash. So you decided a new light must have been erected on the coast very recently and that you had no record of it, although the Hydrographic Office makes every effort to supply such information promptly to mariners."

"I cussed the Japs," said Dan Mumford.

"Decided you were off in your dead reckoning, shoved over the handle of the engine room telegraph and made full speed ahead. The next thing you knew you were in breaking seas—and then you bumped and stuck. Now, as we have proved, there is no light with a six or seven-second flash on the Japanese coast and the light you saw at such infrequent intervals was the light on Ichibu Saki. Now, why did that light show so infrequently?"

"You tell me, sir," said Dan.

"*Because that soft, mushy snow kept accumulating on the lens and froze as fast as it accumulated!* Every ten minutes the light keeper would step out in front of it and with a broad chisel rip the sheet of frozen snow away and let the light beam through. He worked rapidly, being anxious to get out of the bitter cold and back into his snug lighthouse, and while working his body obscured even the dim light that filtered through. Then he'd step out of the way and a clear white light flashed through for six or seven seconds before the light, revolving, swung in another direction.

"As it came around again he'd make another thrust at the frozen snow, following the slowly revolving lens—and

again his body would obscure the beam to such an extent that what little light got past him was not visible on such a thick night.

"So the mystery of the six or seven-second flashes, instead of the fifteen-second flash you had a right to expect, is no longer a mystery. Miss Nellie Landon figured that out, cabled the Hickman agent at Yokohama to investigate, which he did, and now we have an affidavit from the lightkeeper. I imagine the fool will stop the light when he has frozen snow to contend with next time and not chase it around and interfere with the orderly flashes seaward."

He smiled at Dan Mumford.

"Here's a new ticket for you, son. The old one was rather dirty and signed by Eastern inspectors, so we thought we'd give you a new one, good from date. Now, if Johnny Hickman will find a berth for you—by the way, you have to thank Nellie Landon for this. A woman's wit saved you, my son. She made monkeys out of us."

Dan Mumford grinned happily.

"Thank you, sir. Nellie probably will continue to make a monkey out of me, sir—and how I'll love it!" He looked at his watch. "Two P.M," he mused. "I have another license to collect now—and I hope it will never be revoked."

"Pilot for San Francisco bar?" the inspector suggested. "You'll have to show us."

"Marriage license, sir. The marriage license bureau up at the City Hall doesn't close until four o'clock, and so I'll be skipping along to break the news to Nellie Landon. A lot of hard luck has followed our engagement, but we'll chance hard luck now. Neither Nellie nor I are in favor of long engagements—and I have a berth as chief mate waiting for me, until there's a vacancy for a skipper."

"You have? On what ship?"

"I don't know, but some ship of the Hickman Line. Nellie will have attended to that, of course. She wouldn't do a half job! Her name is Nellie E. Landon—and the E stands for efficiency."

# The Real American

By LOWE W. WREN

AMERICAN? Who holds a better right?
This very hill and river and this plain
Were his. His claim is clear as day from night.
He was the first to catch the wind and rain
Of this broad shore. The first to feel and know
These arrowheads that now outlive his bow.

These are the trails he trod, the paths he took
In that young hour of zeal that shapes the wood
And chips the rock. Bend low! A closer look
Will show he marked the land and thought it good
Ages before he saw the first blade drawn
By men—gold mad—who galloped from the dawn.

Here was his home. A place of pleasant sounds;
A hunting ground untiring to his eyes.
Here slept his fathers in their ancient mounds.
And here he flung his blanket to the skies
And dreamed of spring and grass-fat herds of game.
American? Who knows him by the name?

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

# MOON JADE

GEORGE BRUNDAGE watched the fat fingers of F'i Leung caress the tiny jade snuff bottle, although he was well aware that the wealthy Chinese was more interested in the rose quartz one. When Brundage had taken the shining, carved pink bottle from its silk-lined box, F'i Leung had merely clicked a long nail against the polished surface; this very lack of attention showed the white man the truth. The rose quartz was authentically of Six Dynasties manufacture, Brundage had told F'i Leung. Made in the 5th Century, with the original stopper intact.

"An emperor used it," Brundage had explained. "See the screw top, made so that none of the aroma of fine snuff could escape?"

"Hardly a mandarin color," F'i Leung had said. "I prefer jades."

With that the Chinese had returned to his examination of other snuff bottles; a magnificent one of lapis, streaked through its deep blue with threads of bright gold; several jades, ranging in color from white to kingfisher; a carved bottle of ivory, in which a pattern had been worked in green jade; the brownish jade which he now held in his hand . . .

"Jades." F'i Leung smiled. "Jades. You have heard that I am acquiring another secondary wife, Mr. Brundage?"

One of the reasons why many Chinese came to the shop owned by George's father was because neither father nor son showed any interest in the doings of Chinatown, although the inhabitants of San Francisco's Oriental district all knew that the son had spent many years in China finding the treasures displayed in the store. Therefore Brundage bowed and smiled, saying only:

"Many things are heard, F'i Leung. A greater wisdom than mine is necessary to understand the truth."

F'i Leung chuckled as he looked down at the brownish jade bottle in his hand.

"I think you know it," he said.

There was something remarkable about the big old Chinese. Many years ago he had been a *bo' how doy,* a paid hatchetman, with a long list of killings to his credit. He had organized a tong, a society of his own, known as the Nine Devils and, with eight of his kind, highbinders all, and desperate men, he had sold his services to the highest bidder. The Nine Devils were known as the Nine Families now, and were a powerful tong. Respectable. No Chinese society

gave more liberally to charity or bought more tickets for the police ball.

It was rumored that the growing power and wealth of the Nine Families was in some way linked to both opium and coolie smuggling, but no one had ever proved it. Blackmail entered into the amount of gold in the tong treasure chests, but nothing was said of that either. The Nine Families paid many hatchetmen, and gossip was not a sensible indulgence.

Brundage thought of the one man in Chinatown who still held out against F'i Leung—and what it had brought him. Thirty years ago Cheng Wo Wung had himself been head of a tong; now, a broken old man, Cheng Wo Wung sold lichee nuts to brats and tourists, and huddled in warm doorways. Always bitter, what did old Cheng think of the coming marriage, since it was his granddaughter who was to be taken into F'i Leung's household?

While F'i Leung continued examining the jade bottles, Brundage waited for the inevitable bargaining to begin. Sunlight streamed into the shop, brightening porcelains to their true colors; eel-tinted yellow, serpent-greens, carminates and lilacs subtle as spirit flame; a *feng-ho* vase turned to fiery red, and Brundage remembered the villainous *chao-lo'-long* who watched the furnace fires in China. Street noises, utterly Asiatic, continued the illusion, and F'i Leung was forced to repeat his words before George Brundage returned to the States.

He said honestly, grinning:

"I was a long way off, F'i Leung. Sorry. I didn't hear what you said."

"This jade—the price?"

"Two hundred and fifty," Brundage told him without looking at the mark. "And worth a good deal more."

"The workmanship is poor. A hundred should be sufficient."

Brundage said quietly:

"I've made the price low because of your marriage celebration, F'i Leung. That's funeral jade, as you know. The color proves that. There are very few fine funeral jades left in China, and almost none in America."

"You guarantee it?"

"I bought it myself, F'i Leung."

Brundage knew the importance Chinese gave to tomb jade, although the brownish color was hardly attractive to any one else; the material acquired a dull color due to the decomposition of the body with which it was buried, and also to the absorption from other objects placed in the tomb. Had he been mistaken in F'i Leung's desire for the rose quartz snuff bottle? Was the Chinese no longer Oriental in approach, in seeming lack of interest in a desired object? When F'i Leung said nothing the white man added:

"I was there when the tomb was opened. I guarantee the jade, F'i Leung."

THE Chinese now followed proper Oriental practise in bargaining. He lifted his eyes and stared at the ceiling, lest his expression in any way reveal the workings of his mind.

"A hundred and twenty-five," said F'i Leung.

Brundage did the same thing, but his eyes were attracted to the brilliance of the *feng-ho* porcelain. While he stared at the fire-colored vase, the hue seemed to darken to that of old embers; then it returned to its sunlit brightness again. The white man did not move a muscle, although he was positive that only a shadow thrown from the inside of the shop could have caused the momentary difference in shading.

Had one of the Nine Families hatchetmen entered, intent upon guarding F'i Leung? Hardly probable. Chinatown was at peace. The Nine Families no longer had enemies, except old Cheng Wo Wung, who was not worth considering at all. His sons were dead; the Nine Families had cared for that long ago. His one grandson had taken to the ways of the white man and never visited Chinatown. His granddaughter was to join the household of F'i Leung.

A thief might have slipped into the shop. Brundage therefore felt he must be watchful lest sly yellow fingers make off with some treasured bit. He'd search the place as soon as F'i Leung departed. To leave the head of the Nine Families tong would be a serious breach of Chinese custom.

"A hundred and fifty," F'i Leung said sharply, which was entirely improper; he should rightfully have waited until Brundage made a counter proposition. He explained this with:

"I am a busy man today. I can not spend time making much pleasure for bargaining."

Brundage thought:

"That's two mistakes, old fellow. You slipped up in procedure, and in your English. Why?"

Should he offer the jade bottle at two hundred? F'i Leung would probably pay it without argument, and then Brundage would be free to see who had sent the shadow across the flaming porcelain.

He was about to name the figure when the shop door opened noisily and two women entered. Customers. Tourists probably, from the way they carelessly picked up a magnificent five-color K'ang He bowl.

*"Ng' ho mong,"* F'i Leung growled, shifting to Cantonese as he saw the newcomers. "I am in a great hurry. Let us say two hundred for the tomb jade bottle. Here is the money—*ng'chi in s'san lo'*—I give it with pleasure. You have other customers now, waiting—"

In purring dialect Brundage said, face blank:

"Very well, F'i Leung. Take the valuable jade bottle for two hundred, gold, but first replace the rose quartz snuff bottle which by mistake you have placed in your sleeve. Unless you wish to purchase it also."

F'i Leung made no apology. His eyes flicked up to the white man's, and then away; he said in nasal monotone, the rising and falling inflections barely noticeable—

"What is the price of the pink snuff bottle, shopkeeper?"

"Thirty-six hundred, F'i Leung."

A moment's silence, then:

"And you make of it a present to the Nine Families? That is very kind of you."

"I am not making a present at all," Brundage said clearly. "Not of the tomb jade, although I have set a cheap price upon it, and not of the rose quartz bottle, either."

F'i Leung folded his hands over his ample belly.

"If I were in your place—if I were a shopkeeper, I would appreciate the friendship of the Nine Families."

Quietly George Brundage said:

"Give me the rose quartz, F'i Leung. None saw you take it. None have heard our words. It is forgotten."

"I forget nothing," the head of the tong muttered. He let the lovely carved snuff bottle slide out of his sleeve and without a look at it put it on the table. "If you were a Chinese merchant you would not dare refuse F'i Leung a wedding gift. Perhaps before long you will gladly give it to me."

While Brundage automatically waited on the two women, trying to find for them some inexpensive bit of porcelain which had good shape and color, he realized what F'i Leung might do. A word from the head of the Nine Families, and no tong member would come to the shop for anything. Another word, and some night the place would be ransacked, without the slightest possibility of F'i Leung's being connected with the robbery save that the rose quartz snuff bottle would be missing. Worse yet, and more probable, a daylight attack, swift, unexpected, during which any chance of Brundage's ever giving testimony would be rendered impossible, because some 'binder would expertly slip a knife between his ribs.

The police would do their best; but even if Brundage warned them in advance, there would be no clue leading to F'i Leung. A dozen Chinese would be ready to swear that the head of the Nine Families had been in their company when the murder was being done.

Brundage was alarmed, but not panicky. He did not like shopkeeping. Same old thing, day in, day out. The far places, that was where he belonged. Searching after museum pieces. Buying the relics of the Ming Dynasty; Yung Lo, Hsuan Te, Ch'eng Hua, Wan Li; nights, when a fellow slept with his gun beside him, with only the tent of the sky above him. Yet it would have been ungracious for him to refuse his father a vacation.

"I'll start carrying a gun. I've stood off bandits. F'i Leung's hatchetmen

aren't any worse," Brundage thought.

He knew this was untrue. As he wrapped up a little modern yellow bowl for his customers he realized perfectly that bandits were brave enough, but hardly venomous. Hatchetmen killed for pay; killed coldly, without real interest. It was really a mess, and it looked as if it could have only one ending.

The women counted their change; as they left the shop Brundage heard one of them say:

"He's as dark as a Chinaman; maybe he's part Chinese. He can talk it. We heard him—"

"Madam," George Brundage said, his tanned face blank, "did you by any chance look into my eyes while you were here? Because if you did," he went on cheerfully, lighting a cigaret, "you'd have seen that the under lid of my eye joins the upper lid. Now, if I were a Chinese, or even a halfcaste, the upper lid would be above the lower lid, and wouldn't be joined. That's an unfailing rule, ladies."

They were too flustered to apologize; when the door closed behind them Brundage was smiling.

HE BELIEVED now that the shadow on the red porcelain had been caused by one, or a pair, of F'i Leung's *bo' how doy*, entering the shop after their Nine Families chieftain. The thing for him to do—other than rushing out of the shop—was to walk calmly to the rear room, get his gun and do the necessary investigating. It might even be well, gun in hand, to telephone the captain of the Chinatown detail and let him know what might be in the wind. If the men in the shop were Nine Families hatchetmen—provided there was really some one there—and anything happened, the Chinatown detail would try to lay a path to F'i Leung's already bloody door.

If there was nobody in the shop, it was possible that F'i Leung would attempt to get possession of the rose quartz bottle as soon as possible, so as to display it at the marriage ceremonies —another reason for letting the police in on everything, so they might keep a close eye on those hatchetmen known to be in the employ of the Nine Families.

The other, and equally logical, possibility was that with true Oriental patience F'i Leung would wait until things calmed down, and then make his effort to obtain the rose quartz bottle.

Whichever plan the head of the Nine Families put into operation, there remained the fact that never in his life had Brundage asked for help. He had always fought his own fights, even without the incentive of F'i Leung's sneered word, "shopkeeper". The thought of the word, of the Chinese's complete scorn, sent the white man to the rear of the shop with swift strides.

When he returned, without having touched the telephone, the gun was in his coat pocket. He lighted another cigaret, and when he returned the match box to his coat he let his hand remain there also. In the right hand pocket.

Brundage now began a curious business. Apparently intent only on examining the bronzes and porcelains, he moved about the shop gravely, working toward the far corner where several lacquer cabinets stood. Near the cabinets, places of concealment also, were heavy wooden carved screens, black, yellow and red. Men could easily hide behind them.

Just why F'i Leung's *bo' how doy* should remain in the shop was not clear. They might have slipped out while he was in the rear of the store. If they remained, it was because they had overheard that latter part of the conversation, which had been in Chinese, and intended to filch—forcibly if necessary —the rose quartz bottle on which their leader had set his heart. This idea lost force; they might have done it when Brundage had been in the rear office.

Faced with the unknown, Brundage was as keenly excited as by a noise heard at night in a Chinese village where, with valuables in the coolie-packs, he had more than once awaited a bandit attack.

With his left hand he shoved aside the screens; his right now held the gun, ready to fire. His finger, muscle tense, almost pressed trigger at the sight of a dark figure crouched against the wall.

Then he laughed.

"Cheng Wo Wung—" Brundage chuck-

led—"this is a strange place to discover a guest."

The huddle of dark clothing came to its knees, to its feet. Cheng Wo Wung, who had been the head of a friendly tong before F'i Leung organized the dreaded Nine Families, pulled his rags together and stood very straight. In the high thin voice of age, the wizened ancient managed to pipe out a formal sentence.

"*Sang ni kam ch'u ho la.* How are you this morning?"

Brundage wanted to laugh again, but answered the question courteously. Poor old man!

"*Yau sam ki ho ni ni,* Cheng Wo Wung. I trust your health is excellent. Will you come to a chair, honorable grandfather, and let me serve you?"

Cheng Wo Wung's wrinkled face showed his astonishment. He put an unsteady hand on Brundage's sleeve.

"I came to steal," he said. "You know that. Now you will call the men of the law; and while F'i Leung takes my granddaughter to his house, he can enjoy the best joke of all, since his old enemy is in jail."

Brundage said:

"I have no wish to bring joy to F'i Leung, honorable Cheng. Perhaps, in a few minutes, you will eat a few miserable grains of food with me."

Not a word as to what the old Chinese intended to steal. Brundage knew. Something which, even under these circumstances, must be presented to F'i Leung as a wedding gift. Old Cheng had undoubtedly lost face many times, although there is nothing worse than letting a woman go into a new household without a gift. Even if the woman went unwillingly, even if she went to an enemy.

"Food will soon be brought," said George Brundage. "You will honor me by eating my miserable fare?"

Old Cheng lifted his head.

"I have eaten those nuts which were wormy, which I could not sell," he said sorrowfully. "Sometimes an old friend, remembering that once I was head of a tong, placed rice and dried shrimp where I might find the bowl, knowing that I starved. But this was always done carefully, lest F'i Leung hear of it. He is a devil. *Ae-ii!* Look what he has done to me! And you are not afraid of him?"

"I am not afraid of him," Brundage said quietly.

"Then you are a fool!"

Brundage liked the old man better for the harsh comment. He countered with—

"Are you afraid of him, honorable grandfather?"

"I? Do we fear that which we hate? I have never been afraid of him, not even when he found new ways to injure me! Not even when he takes my granddaughter!" The old eyes blazed. "All my life I have been looking for revenge, and now because you must go about knocking fine screens to the floor as if they had no value I am to be beaten again!"

Brundage dragged a heavy teakwood chair into the corner, and not until the old Chinese was sucking on a cigaret did the white man say:

"I tipped over the screen because I saw a shadow. I knew that some one was in the shop." He was sorry for the ancient. "You came to find a present for F'i Leung. Perhaps we can find something, and then you will not lose face—"

"What will I use for payment? All that is left is this—" he beat a skinny paw on his chest—"and what good will it do you?"

Brundage said gently—

"Is there to be talk of payment between friends?"

The Chinese stared at him and then began to run his tongue over dry lips.

"I have had friendship promised before," he said at last. "The day passes, my son. I have my nuts to sell. It is time I went to work again."

"My words have only one meaning," Brundage told him.

He was, very probably, saving old Cheng from serious trouble. If the Chinese left the shop without some sort of package, F'i Leung's spies would promptly report the fact, and Cheng Wo Wung would pay for it; F'i Leung would put two and two together.

"Between friends," Cheng said slowly, eyes never leaving the white man's, "are no secrets, either. First, let me tell you that whatever I give F'i Leung must be of the best. Something that he will use,

even if he thinks it was stolen! Something like that rose quartz bottle for keeping snuff—"

"You heard what F'i Leung said, earlier?"

Cheng Wo Wung spat.

"A poor man who steals does it of necessity; a rich thief is an abomination," he quoted. "He tried to hide the fine pink bottle in his sleeve, while buying the inferior and cheap little bottle of tomb jade. Yes, I heard. And since it is the rose quartz bottle he desires, perhaps I will present it to him for his marriage to my granddaughter."

Here was a problem for Brundage. He had been willing to give the old Chinese a good piece, but the magnificent Six Dynasties snuff bottle, valued at over three thousand, was a different affair.

"It was a snuff bottle I wanted when I came," Cheng Wo Wung said. "Nothing else will serve me. And it must be one that F'i Leung will use while he is waiting for the appearance of his bride. Anything else, grandson, I might have stolen as you spoke with F'i Leung; but the snuff bottles were where you talked with him, so I was forced to wait."

His father would laugh at him, George Brundage supposed; nevertheless he said:

"F'i Leung liked the white-brown jade also; will that one serve? Tomb jade is valuable. This is a small piece, true, but large tomb jades, like the wine urns we seldom see, bring great prices. Surely F'i Leung will be satisfied with the jade bottle?"

"It is too good for him," Cheng growled. "What is the value of the rose colored bottle?"

"Almost four thousand gold," Brundage said soberly.

Cheng Wo Wung's eyes dulled.

"Even between friends, that is too much," he admitted wearily. "You can not give me such a valuable piece, because this is your father's shop, and not your own. If it were yours, I would take the quartz bottle, willingly. But four thousand dollars—*hai-ee!*—how many brown nuts must I sell to make even one dollar!"

"The tomb jade is very fine," Brundage suggested. "Only silver jade is better, and there is no more of that."

"No?" Cheng Wo Wung asked.

"Moon jade, of a silver color, is only in the emperor's tomb."

"A moon jade wine urn, my son—two feet high, two feet broad—would it be worth four thousand gold?"

Brundage smiled.

"It would be worth whatever you asked for it, grandfather."

A sense developed far from the States made Brundage half turn, to see two dark shapes leaning against the wall of the opposite building. F'i Leung's hatchetmen.

"Will you exchange the rose quartz bottle for an urn of moon jade? As a favor to me, O son?"

Had the old man, in his rage, his fear of losing face still more, turned charlatan? Brundage's pity did not diminish, although he said—

"Where is the urn, honorable Cheng?"

"In the tomb of my family. Three thousand years my fathers have slept in the horns of the dragon, with the great urn there to give their spirits comfort when they returned." He lifted his eyes, "O members of the family of Cheng, soon your spirits will thirst forever, but a vengeance will be accomplished! Give me the rose colored bottle, my son. Soon you will receive the great urn."

BRUNDAGE, realizing how he would increase the unfortunate Chinese's bitterness, knew it was utterly ridiculous to give him the Six Dynasties bottle. He said:

"Your great and revered ancestors must not be deprived of their wine for my sake. And I know that the inner chamber of a tomb can only be opened when the last son of the family is placed inside—when the family is ended. There is still yourself in good health, honorable Cheng, and also your grandson—"

"Who has forsaken his gods entirely, even if he will do one thing for me, who raised and fed him in youth when F'i Leung killed his father. *I* am the last of the family. I only worship at the family shrine—if there remained a family shrine here. Nothing is left but our tomb, but every ancestor will praise what price I pay for revenge! We talk

too much. Let me see the bottle. It may be necessary to make a new top for it."

Brundage had let himself into the mess by his own original offer. There was, of course, the fact that if old Cheng presented F'i Leung with the snuff bottle, the powerful head of the Nine Families tong would have less reason to make trouble for the shop. But peace bought at a price of several thousand dollars was vastly too expensive. Peace bought at any price at all from F'i Leung was a thing Brundage would never consider.

He had only one thing left, a flat refusal. But was "saving face" the only reason why Cheng wanted a snuff bottle? Here was a fact worth discovering. The Chinese had said he had come, in the first place, for a snuff bottle, which was why he had not made off with some other piece which might have been used as a gift. Brundage believed that the old man was telling the truth. Why a snuff bottle? What had it to do with vengeance, which obviously was what Cheng was after?

Brundage brought the rose quartz and handed it to the Chinese. Immediately, without examining the workmanship, Cheng looked at the top.

"*Ai!*" he ejaculated. "It screws on! O son, this is perfect! F'i Leung is indeed delivered into my hands at last! I have him now!"

Instead of continuing an elaborate song of triumph, explaining exactly what was in mind—which was what Brundage expected the elated Chinese would do—old Cheng whirled about. With the swiftness and agility of the brats who filched nuts from his tray, the old man hurried out of the shop.

Brundage shouted, "Wait!" but this only increased the rapidity of Cheng's flight.

To chase the Chinese down the main street of Chinatown would have been ridiculous—just about as senseless, Brundage supposed, as letting the sly old man get away with the rose quartz snuff bottle.

The two hatchetmen loitering opposite the shop made no attempt to follow the old man. Therefore their job was to watch the shop, to watch Brundage for F'i Leung. Intimidation, probably. That was a common Chinese practise. It would do little good in scaring the white man. He was positive that the 'binders could not know that Cheng had the rose quartz which their tong leader coveted, or they would have made short work of obtaining it. Although Cheng had trotted southward, instead of into the heart of the Asiatic district, they would have caught him before he got as far as the first corner, and then the snuff bottle would have been on its way to F'i Leung.

BRUNDAGE had little appetite for lunch when it was brought in. He was brusk with the shop assistant who helped during the afternoon. He felt that he had made a magnificent mess of everything, considered from any angle at all. He had refused the snuff bottle to F'i Leung, and had let Cheng have it. In other words, he had given it, as F'i Leung would believe, to the one enemy of the Nine Families tong. Which would mean trouble. From a monetary standpoint, the shop—he and his father—were out three thousand dollars. However, if he had to lose the rose quartz, he was glad that it was to Cheng, even if the old rascal gave it to F'i Leung in order to save face.

So far as the moon jade wine urn which Cheng had spoken of was concerned, Brundage thought he had just as good a chance of receiving the moon itself.

During the afternoon a small package was delivered to the shop, brought in by a Chinese youngster. Nothing much, just a dozen splinters of bamboo, sharpened to points. Brundage knew what they meant—the promise of torture. All a part of the system of frightening him, but proof also that F'i Leung did not know Cheng Wo Wung had already run off with the snuff bottle. Brundage carefully broke each of the bits of bamboo, and had the rewrapped package taken to the Nine Families headquarters. To accompany them he took a bullet from his gun and sent it along with the snapped splinters. No other message was needed.

Whatever F'i Leung had in mind, other than intimidation, would certainly

not be put in operation until after the marriage banquet. The head of the Nine Families tong might think little of gods and devils himself, but he would not offend Chinatown by a violation of custom—certainly not now, when he was "respectable" and no longer a *bo' how doy* himself. Even if discretion and good sense insisted that Brundage should inform the Chinatown detail, there was no necessity of doing it before tomorrow. He supposed that his wish to meet the affair single-handed was ridiculous. F'i Leung would use every means to his hand. He himself ought to tell the police, but it need not be done until morning.

The great bell of the old cathedral marked the hours; afternoon darkened to twilight, and the electric lanterns of Chinatown glowed in green and yellow. At eight Brundage would lock up the shop—no, tonight he would wait until the patrolman sauntered past, usually a few minutes after eight, and casually walk with him to California Street, boarding a cable car there. Brundage wanted to eliminate everything save a direct meeting with F'i Leung.

Eight times the bell clapper struck against bronze; the last beat hummed out almost completely. Then a discordant minor wail took up the sound, and almost at once a two-stringed *san-h'in* twanged to keep the flute company. Cadenced voices, high and shrill, began the endless chant of the "Virtuous Lily," which would last until the singers were exhausted, or the marriage banquet ended. Brundage had not known that the celebration was to be this night; in accordance with custom the exact evening was a secret to all except those who would attend, lest some headless demon of the underworld attend the function.

Even so, there was no cause for immediate alarm. The *bo' how doy* lurked across the street, but they would do nothing until the night-long performance was ended. Brundage saw no reason why he should even wait for the advent of the patrolman before going to his rooms; he went to the rear of the shop, snapped off all the lights save the one night light near the front, found his hat and, with wail of flute and jangle of stringed instruments in his ears, walked quietly toward the door.

The Chinese would be perched on high teakwood stools. At the head of the many tables would be F'i Leung, in heavy silks. Somewhere in F'i Leung's household the granddaughter of Cheng must be crouching. Although her lord and his guests would eat until they were red in the face, her fare would be a handful of uncooked rice and one pot of tea, lest she become sleepy from food. The others would gorge themselves with suckling pig stuffed with duck, ham, pork and chicken; there would be eggs so old that they were black, mixed with *kan fan*—dry rice; bamboo shoots, pea tendrils in perfumed *ts'ang icou* sauce; almond milk and cherries and bits of sugar cane; bean cheese; fish and shrimp and dried squid and gray snails.

Cheng Wo Wung would be there, perhaps in a borrowed silk coat, but he would not be invited to eat. He would be the butt of F'i Leung's jokes, and the head of the Nine Families would not spare him, even when the old man presented him with the magnificent snuff bottle. Between great mouthfuls of food F'i Leung would take snuff, spooning it out with the little ivory stick fastened to the stopper, passing it from hand to hand—but never to Cheng, his discredited pauper enemy, who must have stolen the rose quartz F'i Leung had himself attempted to secure.

The discordant music rose higher. That meant to Brundage that some one was offering a gift to F'i Leung. Brundage wondered if poor old Cheng, bowing, was putting the lovely snuff bottle into the pudgy fingers of the man who had broken him. What a strange and rather awful thing the Chinese custom of "saving face" could be!

A drum rolled under agile fingers. A flute screamed a high note. Then suddenly the music stopped.

Brundage thought that he heard a single shout.

Cable cars on the next street clanged bells as they passed. Brundage heard nothing save the monotonous, drum-like sound of the cables. The music had ceased.

Something had certainly happened. Had Cheng Wo Wung, as he presented the snuff bottle, driven a knife into F'i

Leung's gross heart? That was impossible. The music had not stopped until the drum rolled, and the drum had been beaten when F'i Leung was examining the present. That was the custom. More, Cheng would be clear across the table from F'i Leung, again according to custom. Any strange movement on the part of the pauper nut-vender would have brought instant action from Nine Families hatchetmen, who would have accompanied him to F'i Leung's table.

"I think I'll be getting along," Brundage decided. "Something's happened, and I'll find out soon enough what it is."

The street lights, yellow and green lanterns, showed him the two hatchetmen across the street. Both were staring northward, into Chinatown, as if trying to decipher the riddle of silence. They too knew that something had happened.

IN THE darkened shop Brundage turned and took his usual final look about; as he again faced front the door opened. His hand flashed to his pocket, but came out as a man walked inside.

"If you aren't closing up, if you don't have to leave at once," the newcomer said apologetically, "I'd like to see the yellow bowl in your window."

"I've all the time in the world," Brundage said, wondering if he were telling the truth.

He glanced once more at the customer. Tall, well built, almost blond. No member of the Nine Families, certainly! A visitor, who didn't know that stores in Chinatown were being shut at eight; in past years many remained open until ten or later.

"I'll snap on the lights first, and—"

"The bowl is to go in a dark corner of our house," the visitor said. "I'd as soon see it in this half light."

It was an unusual request, but a logical one. As Brundage started toward the show window, his customer scratched a match, and Brundage smelled burning tobacco; the flare of the second match—when he was positive the cigaret had already been lighted—made him whirl about.

The man's face was lighted by the match. Brundage's hand again went to his coat pocket, and this time the gun came out.

"Don't move," he said shortly. The "customer" was a halfcaste; Brundage had seen the Mongol eyelids. "I mean it. That was a nice signal, wasn't it? Two matches meant I'd go into the window, and your 'binder brothers across the way could have a shot at me."

"The only chance *you* have," the halfcaste snarled, "is to keep your finger off the trigger. You can look and see what's going to happen, unless we change our minds; I *did* light both matches, didn't I?"

Brundage didn't need to turn. He could hear the opening door. He backed a step away, and then jumped to the right, so as to get the door and the halfcaste both in line with his gun. He held fire, even with the two hatchetmen slipping into the shop; held fire, because it was time for the Chinatown patrolman to be passing the shop. That was the time to start things. He could get the halfcaste; could he manage to hit both 'binders before one of them finished him? Every second gained, before the start of trouble, gave the officer so much more chance of reaching the front of the shop.

The Chinese would attempt to talk him out of shooting if they could; would try to get a knife into him. The original plan, Brundage's rapidly working head told him, must have been to get him out of the way, into the shop window, so the *bo' how doy* could enter the shop and silently overpower him. They, as well as he, knew at what time the patrolman was due at this point on his beat. His first guess had been wrong; no shooting at all was intended.

The two black clad 'binders whispered a word together while the halfcaste said in Cantonese:

"F'i Leung has given his orders, brothers. This one must be killed, here and now—"

In the same dialect Brundage asked—"Why?"

"You know about the snuff bottle—"

Had F'i Leung become so enraged at the sight of the rose quartz bottle that he had stopped the ceremonies and banquet? Brundage said quietly—

"Am I to be blamed if a snuff bottle

disappears from my shop?"

"One to the right, one to the left," the Eurasian commanded, this time in Pekingese.

Brundage, understanding, was ready. The first shot for the halfcaste!

In the little instant of silence before attack, all four men heard the same thing. Footsteps on the pavement!

"Now, brothers," breathed the halfcaste, suddenly throwing discretion to the winds.

Brundage fired instantly, before the man of mixed blood could even reach for a weapon; his gun swung in a swift arc as he fired again, and missed. The hatchetman's blade was high as Brundage fired hastily; so near was the 'binder that both shots took effect, although the Chinese still came on, face distorted. The third Chinese had been forced to round a showcase; Brundage's finger pressed the trigger, but the fifth bullet from the automatic had already been sent to F'i Leung . . .

The white man tried to dodge away from the approaching unwounded 'binder. At any moment the one he had hit twice ought to topple over; Brundage thought that one smash at the fellow's bloodless face would drop him.

"Take him with you when you go, O brother," the uninjured hatchetman shrilled, as he forced Brundage step by step to back toward the wavering *bo' how doy*. "He can be your dog in hell!"

Brundage hurled the empty gun at the evil face; ducking, the Chinese laughed. This way and that the hatchetman danced, the point of his knife giving Brundage no chance to step in close. The wounded 'binder steadied himself, both hands about the haft of the heavy knife. He had but one blow left; it was obvious that it would be a deadly one.

The white man's mind was made up. Another step backward, and then he would whirl and try to smash the hatchetman down; then, if he were only fast enough, he could again face the last of the men of F'i Leung.

His muscles tensed; then he heard the voice of old Cheng.

"I am here, my son!" shouted Cheng. "I am here!"

WHAT happened next was almost too fast for the eye to follow. Old Cheng had come to his knees from behind the counter where he had hidden after slipping into the shop. The wounded hatchetman's knife, guided by both hands, flashed down into the ancient's chest. Brundage himself, as the other 'binder's eyes moved, sprang forward, right hand following left in two furious blows.

Kicking the blade away from the 'binder's limp hand, Brundage saw a tangle behind him. Both old Cheng and the hatchetman were in one tangle. The *bo' how doy*, unconscious at last, was coughing blood; Cheng's tattered jacket was sticky with the hatchetman's blood, and his own.

Brundage thought that the old man was dead from the terrible blow, but Cheng's eyes opened. He saw Brundage in the dimmed light; saw him, and said:

"I did it, my son! I! I alone! *Hai-ee!* Into the great room of the Nine Families, all hung with silks, all smelling with fine perfumes and fine food, walked old Cheng. Cheng the vender, in a borrowed coat! Up to the tables walked old Cheng, the man of no family. The man without sons.

" 'A present for you, O powerful and nobly born F'i Leung,' I said. 'Is it a handful of wormy nuts, O last of a litter of pigs?' F'i Leung asked of me. 'Open, and you shall see,' I told him.

"F'i Leung opened the box. He always was a greedy person. And there he found the priceless snuff bottle of rose colored material. 'And in it,' I said humbly, 'is the finest Emperor's Snuff.'

"How he loved the bottle between his fingers! How he lifted it up so all might see, and enjoy this joke on Cheng Wo Wung! How he carefully put it under his nose in the most graceful manner and unscrewed the top!

"And how he died! How he choked to death, just as my grandson, who is a maker of medicines and forgets his gods, swore that he would die! He sniffed deeply, did F'i Leung, his nose above what he thought was snuff in the bottle! And now he is dead, and the family of Cheng is revenged. I wish

you might have seen how miserably he died, my son!"

Brundage said:

"You lie quietly, Cheng Wo Wung. Don't talk any more. I'll get a doctor." Under his breath Brundage added, "And I'll also get the police."

"What do I want with doctors? No more will I sell nuts to babies. I will not be remembered as old Cheng, but as Cheng Wo Wung, who had his vengeance. I may be the last of my line, but none will sneer at me!"

He spoke so clearly, so strongly, that Brundage was almost ready to doubt the testimony of the flow of blood, and to think that the old man might have a chance to live.

Then an American voice filled the dim shop:

"Mr. Brundage! Anything wrong?"

"Plenty, Officer," Brundage agreed. "Couple of dead Chinese. Two more on the way—"

"I was just walkin' along, sir, and saw the door standin' open, with th' night light burnin'. There's been trouble down at th' Nine Families, too, although I couldn't get any of 'em to tell me what happened. Best I got was, 'We take care of it.' Nobody knows what killed F'i Leung*. So headquarters said maybe you'd come down to th' Hall of Justice and act as interpreter. Our own's on vacation—"

"I'll talk to the sergeant," Brundage said, while the patrolman stared at the bodies on the floor. "I'm the last person to do any interpreting, I'm afraid."

"Old Cheng dead, eh? He in with this gang? Try to hold you up, Mr. Brundage? Cheng, why, I always liked the old fellow—"

"You can still like him," Brundage said soberly. "He probably saved my life. It's a curious tale. Cheng came in just as—"

The ancient's eyes opened.

Wrinkles radiated from his thin old mouth; he said clearly:

"Allo time come you like steal lichee nuts, p'liceman! Now, *maskee*—nuts done. Cheng done too."

The patrolman, like Brundage, recognized death. He spoke very softly:

"You want I go get China priest, Cheng?"

The Chinese smiled; he said to Brundage:

"There is no need of a priest, my son. I have accomplished what I set out to do. Think of me when you see the moon jade wine urn. It must come from China, from our tomb; my grandson will see to it, for he has promised. *Hai-ee!* I will be very dry when I am in that tomb without any wine! I go in, the last of my line. The last Cheng who believes in the gods. So it is proper that you, who gave me my means of revenge, should have the urn. If I thirst, I will think how F'i Leung choked when he sniffed at the bottle, and that will satisfy me!"

"The urn is unimportant, honorable grandfather," Brundage said. "Leave it in China, in the tomb of your family—"

Somehow, Brundage did not want the old Chinese, a believer in the traditions of his kind, to die with the thought that a lie was in his throat at death.

"You saved my life, O Cheng Wo Wung," Brundage said gently. "That is payment for the rose quartz snuff bottle—"

"It is very lovely, that urn of moon jade," Cheng whispered, his voice failing for the first time. "The color of silver. Here and there you will see the shine of many stars. You yourself said it was of sufficient value to pay for the bottle, and I am glad. That one who was my grandson before he neglected the gods will see to it, or I will haunt him. It is truly wonderful, my son, but not as wonderful as—as—my revenge."

Brundage still knelt beside the old Chinese when the officer said softly:

"He's gone, sir. I always liked th' old fellow. Now I'll be phonin' headquarters."

"He's dead," Brundage agreed. "I wonder, did he try to save face by lying to the last?"

Three months later the crate containing the moon jade urn, white and silver and the color of stars, was delivered to George Brundage. Brundage has never placed it in the shop, but keeps it at home.

*It was afterward found that F'i Leung was killed by hydrocyanic acid, a good breath of which is sufficient to cause instant death.

# Black Magic

By T. SAMSON MILLER

THERE is a disposition to dismiss African magic as mumbo-jumbo—nonsense, gross superstition. But that disposition does not hold with British administrators in Africa or other whites who have sojourned there for any length of time. Without a doubt the wizard does possess powers as yet unexplored by science. For one thing, he is a super-hypnotist.

A British magistrate in the Tanganyika country records an instance where a medicine man made three thousand blacks believe that a huge wild fig tree, which stood nobly before their very eyes, was lying on the ground. The tree was the abode of the spirit of a deceased chief, so its fallen state was a great calamity. Having made the blacks believe the tree was down, the wizard's next job was to make them believe that by his occult powers he had restored the tree to its upright position, which he did. The magistrate was there and, being immune to the mesmeric power of the wizard, he was the only man in the crowd who failed to see the tree in a fallen state.

By power of the "evil eye"—hypnotic power—the wizard can inflict imaginary disease; and the terror of the victim, his conviction that he is actually suffering from such a disease, will actually produce the symptoms of that disease. But scientists have experimented with the force of suggestion; witness the famous experiment of medico-hypnotists, in which they put a postage stamp on the arm of a hypnotized patient, told him it was a blistering plaster, and blisters actually appeared.

The writer is reminded of an instance in the exercise of this wizardry which he witnessed on the Niger. The *punkah* boy had a violent quarrel with the mess boy. The mess boy got possession of hairs from the head of the *punkah* boy, took them to the wizard and paid him to use the hairs to work "sympathetic magic" and inflict stomach pains on the *punkah* boy. Then he let the latter know in a roundabout way what he had done. Straightway fear gripped the *punkah* boy. He began to feel pains in the stomach. The pains grew worse and worse. It was useless to tell him that he was the victim of his own imagination. He became very sick. There was only one thing for him to do, and he did it. He went to the wizard and paid him an exorbitant fee to exorcise the evil.

Judged by the cited incident, a wizard is a cunning and conscienceless fakir. Yet he must possess real power and a high grade of intelligence to hold his position as the tribe's medicine man. Upon what is this power based? The writer noted two things common to the wizards of West Africa—keenly intelligent faces and steady, fearless eyes. There was an air of knowledge and of conscious superiority about them.

The wizard is a reader of men, and he knows intimately the character of every person in his village. He is a herbalist, knows the rudiments of osteopathy, knows how to set bones, knows poisons, has some knowledge of the action of blood, is a close observer of the skies and clouds, and is weather wise. He possesses remarkable mesmeric powers, and another power whose very existence is doubted by a great many scientists—telepathy. Countless explorers, officials and traders have cited instances of blacks receiving mental messages from wizards at a distance of many miles.

By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

*Continuing*

# *The* BROAD ARROW

***The Story Thus Far:***

THE hatred of Captain Henry Killough sent his cousin, Geoffrey Blake, to the convict camps of Australia on a life sentence for murder. Killough falsely testified that he had seen Blake fleeing the house of the dead man. To keep his uncle, Sir Eustace Blake, ignorant of the disgrace into which he had fallen, Blake assumed the alias of John Haxon.

On the prison ship *Success,* of which Killough was master, Blake was deported to Australia. One morning Victoria Day, the reigning beauty of Sydney, who lately had announced her engagement to Killough, visited the ship with her friend, Mary McQueen. By chance the visitors caught sight of Blake being led away from the whipping frame—and Victoria, crying his name in horror, fainted. Mary McQueen, assured the prisoner's name was in truth Haxon by the captain, recalled that Victoria had been in love with young Blake back in England, before he dropped mysteriously from sight. She now believed that Killough held his own cousin a prisoner here.

To get Blake as far from Victoria as possible, Killough had him transferred to the convict station of the brutal Major McQuirk, from which he shortly escaped with two chosen companions, Burke and Robbins.

Following the outlaw trail, Blake held up the bank at Parametta a short time later. In the gunfight that followed, Mary McQueen, who happened to be a bystander, was accidentally shot. At risk of his own life Blake stood over her with drawn gun until a doctor could be summoned.

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Several days later, on the way to visit the wounded girl, Blake rescued a man who had been pegged out to die by another bushranger, Jack Lynch.

To his amazement, Blake recognized the fellow as one Jones, who had been at Killough's side the day he perjured away his cousin's freedom. Relentlessly then he set to questioning Jones until he broke down:

"Henry Killough, he murdered Mullin. Mullin worked for your uncle, Sir Eustace, and saw Killough steal some money from him. Killough murdered Mullin, then laid it on you. I saw it by accident, and Killough threatened to kill me if I didn't back him up . . ."

Blake forced Jones to retell his story before Jim Stuart, a friendly magistrate, who promised to send word to Sir Eustace immediately.

At Mary McQueen's house Blake found Victoria Day and Killough. Sneeringly the outlaw greeted the girl, then stared grimly at his quaking cousin. Mary McQueen, who sensed the great injustice done Blake, prevailed upon him to leave without adding another crime to his list. Then, when he had gone, she began to question Victoria, who haltingly admitted that she had known all along that Blake was innocent—that she had been with him in his rooms at the time of the crime.

"But I couldn't ruin my reputation by telling that, could I?" she wailed.

"I knew you were selfish in little things," Mary told her bluntly. "But this is different. You must speak out to save your own soul!"

"AFTER pretending to be my friend and worming it out of me I suppose you'll tell." Victoria wept in her handkerchief. "I'm so dreadfully unhappy. I have been for years, and instead of sympathizing with me you—you—"

"Can't you see that the wrong you have done keeps leading you on to other wrongs?" Mary said. "Now you think you have to marry this vile man who ruined his cousin by fastening on him the crime he had committed. You'll find you can't stop even there. There will never be an end to it as long as you live."

"I know." The handkerchief in Victoria's hands was twisted into a tight knot. "It all came because I loved Geoff too well. I should have given him up, as my aunt told me to do, when he went bad. But I let myself be carried away—"

Mary broke into her friend's explanation indignantly.

"It didn't come from your loving him too well at all. It came from your not loving him well enough. Don't you see, if you had come out and saved Geoffrey, he would have loved you forever and ever?"

"What could we have done? I would have been an outcast; and after his passage was paid to Canada he didn't have a ten-pound note left. What kind of an emigrant's wife do you think I would make? No. We were up a blind alley. There wasn't any way out—and there's none now."

Mary faced Victoria gravely and said in a tone not meant to be cruel, but which nevertheless carried a wealth of accusation—

"Except to live a lie all your life behind a false smile?"

"I'm not choosing it, am I?" The girl made one of her graceful little lifts of the hands to express the futility of fighting against an evil fate. "I go where I'm driven. I can't help myself."

"It's silly to say that. We make our own lives." Mary spoke with sharp, exasperated energy. "If we have any courage we don't have to be drifters."

"Maybe you make yours," Victoria said. "I don't make mine. I have to remember what other people will think."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BLAKE PLAYS CONSTABLE

THROUGH a broken, scrubby country Geoffrey Blake rode steadily hour after hour under an Austral moon. He moved in a weird and lonesome setting. Only the buzzing of the mosquitos broke the silence.

At midnight he pulled up and unsaddled, rubbed the ears of his horse dry, and hobbled the forelegs. He built a fire and made a billy of tea. After he had finished this he shook out his blanket, covered up from the mosquitos as well as he could and slept for a few hours. It was still dark when he took the road again.

About daybreak he reached a shanty kept by a ticket-of-leave man to alleviate the thirst of such furtive travelers as had business in this rough outback country. The man was one of a gang of cattle duffers* who operated in the runs that lay within reasonable distance of the hill country where he lived.

The hut was dark and no smoke came from the chimney. Blake gave a cooey. This he repeated two or three times. A man in bare feet, wearing only fustian trousers and a cotton shirt very much soiled from overwear, came to the door and demanded what he wanted. He was still rubbing sleep from his eyes, and his face was sour.

"Time you got up, Ross," the bush-ranger said. "The glad young morning calls you with smiling face to the labors of the day."

"Oh, it's you!" The shanty keeper made an effort to look pleasant. "Better pound your horse and have some tea and damper with us. I was just getting up anyhow."

"Who do you mean by *us?* Who is with you?"

"A couple of old hands who are partners of mine. They're all right. They're jammock."

"I daresay, but don't tell them who I am."

Blake swung from the saddle and put his horse in the pound, but he did not loosen the girths. It was possible he

*Duffing was the term used for stealing cattle. This might be done by defacing a brand, by marking calves, or by running off the stock. It is the same as rustling in the United States.

might have to leave in a hurry. Of late the constabulary had at times pressed him so closely that he had escaped only by showing them the heels of his horse.

He followed Ross into the shanty. Two rough looking customers were getting up from bedsteads made by stretching dried cowskins over four posts driven into the ground. The floor was of dirt, and the furniture home-made.

"This swell 's all right," Ross told them. "He won't split."

"I don't know anything to split, and I'm not asking questions," Blake said.

"Better not," one of them growled.

Ross set about making breakfast. He had to interrupt the chore once to get his friends some gin from the bar, which was in a little side room. In an incredibly short time the cook called his guests to come and get their food. Four quart pots of tea were brewing in a corner of the fireplace. He divided the hindquarters of two kangaroo rats and put the meat on tin plates. He scraped back the wood ashes of the fire and drew out a large damper which he also cut into sections.

"Which way you heading, mate?" one of the men asked Blake.

The bushranger smiled.

"All right. Question for question. Tell me first whether you find gully raking* profitable these days."

With an oath one of the duffers started to his feet.

"What kind of a cove are you?" he growled. "You can't gammon us, mister, if that's your game. Who are you? You're wearing too many pistols to suit me."

Blake continued to smile, though with a certain oblique irony.

"I'm not a constable, if that's what you're getting at. You asked me a question. I asked you one. Fair enough, isn't it?"

"Stow your gaff, Browny," the shanty keeper ordered. "Don't you know better than to ask questions here of a swell like this gentleman? I told you he was all right. Isn't that enough for you?"

Browny was a surly fellow. He gave way, but reluctantly.

"It's your shanty, Ross," he growled. "This cove is too flash for me. But if you like him, it suits me. All I want to know is that he's not working with the traps."

Breakfast finished, the bushranger drew four cheroots from a pocket. Three he tossed on the table. The fourth he lighted for himself.

"Time I took the road," he said. "Thanks for your hospitality."

"Glad to have you any time, Mr. Haxon."

The name slipped out quite unintentionally. The shanty keeper caught himself up too late, tried to correct his mistake, and succeeded only in stressing it.

Blake made nothing of it.

"Doesn't matter, Ross. I'll be gone in five minutes. Don't let me disturb your friends when I go. Just let them finish their cheroots here."

Underneath the casual words the ticket-of-leave man read an underlying warning. He understood them to mean, "Don't let your friends try to earn that five hundred pounds for the capture of John Haxon dead or alive."

The bushranger sauntered to the door. The shock of what he saw held him rigid for a moment. Three uniformed constables were standing at the gate of the pound. They were looking at his horse. No animal in New South Wales was better known than that stallion. It was as much a part of the Haxon legend as the rider himself. Geoffrey Blake felt in his throat the quick pulse of excitement that always began to prick with the knowledge of close danger.

INSTANTLY he made up his mind what to do. Without a horse he was lost. They would run him down like a dingo before he could reach his friends.

Jauntily he strutted across the open, a complacent smile on his face. Without a touch of make-up he contrived by a change of manner, voice and expression to become the official new chum just arrived in the colony. He was staking everything on the chance that these troopers had not yet met the re-

*The term arose from the fact that cattle duffers raked the gullies for heifers and calves belonging to settlers.

cently appointed deputy commissioner who had landed at Sydney less than three weeks ago.

"Right enough, my lads," he called in a high, cheerful voice that contrived to be offensively derisive. "But you're a bit late in the day—as usual. Mr. Haxon is in the shanty there with the cuffs on him, guarded by two of my men. I've heard a lot of tosh about that gentleman since I arrived. It's a lot of bally rot given out by you fellows to excuse yourselves. I said I'd take him and, by Jove, I have."

The constables turned abruptly to stare at this immaculately got up new chum. Well they knew the type, and much they resented that smug assumption of superiority. Every young scrub who came over from England with a background of middle class assurance and no knowledge of life wore it.

"Who are you?" the sergeant asked, not without irritation, though he thought he knew already. It could be nobody but the new deputy, Hetherington.

"I'm the new deputy commissioner, my man. Name of Hetherington. Lyulph Harcourt Beresford Hetherington, if you want the whole mouthful. And my first word to you is that what you chaps need is to get on your toes, by Jove! I told the chief I'd get this yellow canary bird for him, and there he is with the bracelets on him. Clean bowled in the middle stump, begad."

His air of self-satisfaction was insufferable. Sergeant Mountjoy had followed Haxon for months. He was gaunt from hard riding and insufficient rest. More than once he had almost got him. Now by some sheer chance this vacuous scrub had bagged the game. He was not only boasting of it; he was jeering at better men for their failures. What Mountjoy would have liked to do was to belt him one in the eye. But, of course, he could not afford such an expression of relief. It would have to go as a suppressed desire.

"How did you get him, sir?" he asked coldly.

The bushranger's explanation covered the fact, which would presently occur to the constables, that the horses of the Hetherington posse were nowhere to be seen.

"Tracked him here. Left our mounts back of the hill. Stole up and surprised him at breakfast, by Jove."

Mountjoy was a heavyset, stolid man, not at all clever, slow of thought, but a bulldog for pertinacity. He was greatly disappointed. It had been his great ambition to get Haxon.

"He didn't show any fight, sir?"

The pseudo-Hetherington visibly swaggered.

"Not a bit. Took it like a lamb. What else could he do, with three guns trained on him? It's all in knowing how to do it, my man."

One of the troopers was a keen, light limbed young fellow. He looked to Blake as though he knew the time of day. His dark eyes suggested suspicion. The outlaw made a bold try at getting rid of him.

"What's your name, my lad?" he asked.

"Brown, sir."

"Just step along to the shanty and tell my men to bring the prisoner out. We'll be starting."

Brown hesitated. He was not satisfied. It was not that he actually doubted the story. This Hetherington was just the kind of fathead they would send out from home for the job, an annoying jackass who would break the morale of the force in a few months. Anything was good enough for the colonies. That seemed to be the motto of the government. And yet—it was a bit of amazing luck, hardly believable, that such a fool could lay Haxon by the heels at once, without any experience of the bush.

"What constables have you with you, sir?"

"Hetherington" congealed. His body stiffened and his face set. Such effrontery as this seemed to be unheard of in his experience.

"Did you hear my order?" he asked icily.

Brown's heels clicked together. He saluted, turned and walked to the house.

That he must act instantly Blake knew. He had before him, until the fireworks would begin, only as long a time as it would take for Brown to

walk from the pound to the house. With no apparent haste he lounged to the gate and leaned with his forearms across the top bar. Admiringly he looked at the stallion.

"By Jove, he's a beauty. Too good for a scalawag like that Haxon," he said.

Mountjoy made an explanation, with a trace of sullen reluctance.

"Haxon raided a breeding station up Pondoroo way and took him. He's a thoroughbred, got by Rex III out of Devon Colt."

The other constable offered a variation of the usual back block joke.

"He ought to be riding Bramby* got by Chivvying out of Scrub."

As though moved by an impulse, Blake opened the gate and walked into the pound. The gate swung to behind him.

"Look out, sir, he may kick," the constable said.

The outlaw gave him one look. It told the trooper in scornful silence to mind his own business.

Blake moved toward the spirited animal and put a hand on the long mane. The satin nose of the stallion came around and snuggled against the other arm of the outlaw.

"That's funny," Mountjoy said, much surprised.

"Think I'll take a shot at riding him," Blake said, glancing over his shoulder at the sergeant.

He saw back of Mountjoy something that made him hasten. The trooper, Brown, was standing at the door of the shanty talking with his namesake, the cattle duffer. A sudden excitement animated them. The constable turned and started running toward the pound.

Already the bushranger was in the saddle. To the sergeant he shouted a sharp order.

"Stand clear of that gate!"

Mountjoy stared at him. The stallion was pounding toward the gate, his rider crouched low for the jump. Even now the sergeant did not realize what this sudden drive to furious action meant, though he knew he had to get out of the way or be trampled down.

"Stop him! It's Haxon!" Brown's shout rang out imperatively.

The stallion sailed over the bars and as he landed struck the sergeant, flinging him a dozen yards. Caught off balance, the horse staggered and went down. Blake plowed into the hard pan of the baked ground, but scrambled at once to his feet. Out of a corner of his eye he saw that Mountjoy had been knocked senseless and that Brown was still thirty yards away. The third constable charged at him.

His weapon forgotten, the man tried to close with the bushranger. Blake lashed out, not wildly, but with a savage precision. His fist caught the constable on the point of the chin and the man went down as if he had been struck with a hammer.

As the outlaw dodged behind the horses of the troopers he saw that Brown was dragging out a pistol. Even then Blake's brain functioned coolly. He would have flung himself astride one of the horses and galloped away, but the bridles were tied securely to posts. Instead, he ducked under the belly of one, gave a sharp, shrill whistle and ran into the open.

The stallion heard the summons, looked and started to trot to Blake. Brown fired at the outlaw, then made a dive at the hanging bridle rein. The horse flung up his head and shied, breaking into a canter.

Again Blake whistled. He was running toward the cover of the bush. A shot rang out from the shanty. The cattle duffer, Browny, was doing his best to earn five hundred pounds.

The stallion caught up with his master at the edge of the bush. The bushranger seized the pommel of the saddle with his left hand and vaulted into the seat. In another moment horse and rider were lost in the scrub.

## CHAPTER XIX

### BUSH FIRE

BLAKE climbed a stony ridge sprinkled thinly with ironbark trees. Since morning he had not seen a soul. For hours he had been traveling through a sun drenched desert

*A bramby was a wild horse, usually of poor quality, obtained by the settler through running him down in the scrub.

of scrub, monotonous and unpleasant. Dust caked his throat, sifted into every wrinkle of his clothes. On the ridge was a slab built, zinc-roofed shanty long since deserted. Some kangarooer had camped here for a season and gone his way.

The bushranger dismounted, unsaddled his horse and lay for half an hour beneath the shade of an ironbark. He slept, and was awakened by the shrill chattering of a laughing jackass. Always exaggerated, its clamor seemed to him more excited than usual. He sat up to discover the reason. The bird was engaged in deadly battle with a venomous black snake.

The strategy of the bird brought victory. It pounced, with incredible swiftness, again and again, not quite near enough to be struck by the fangs lashing out at it. The snake grew weary. The head drooped. Its lunges grew feebler. The laughing jackass feinted no longer, but darted at its enemy and caught it by the back of the neck. The reptile thrashed and struggled. Its writhings became languid and presently ceased.

The outlaw resaddled and resumed his journey. The hill spurs became more numerous, the travel rougher. He was drawing closer to the range into the backbone of which Blind Man's Gap thrust itself like a sword cleft. Along a sandy river bed, dry as a lime kiln, his horse wound its way. The scrub along the banks was dense.

Into the red earth the bed of the stream cut deeper. It became a confusion of rock ledges and boulders. During the rainy season there were times when the sand strip over which he now rode was a raging river, sweeping everything before it. That was the trouble with this rich, inhospitable land, he reflected. Either a feast or famine. One was in danger either of perishing from thirst or of being swept away in a torrent.

A wall of gneiss rose sheer in Blake's path. No thoroughfare here, it seemed to say. But at the last moment the sand wash swung sharply to right and then to left. There was a fault in the cliff, and through this break the bed of the stream went. A thick growth of scrub almost completely concealed the entrance to the canyon.

Into the gap the horseman rode. Before he had gone a hundred yards the walls of quartzite boxing the canyon were fifty feet high and very precipitous. He passed a seepage sink and observed that the ground had been trampled recently by shod horses. The tracks might have been made by the horses of his own men or by those of other outlaws. That was probable, but not certain. He rode with extreme caution, watching every bush and boulder for a possible enemy. Only by the use of the greatest vigilance had he kept life and liberty as long as he had. The least relaxation of watchfulness might destroy him.

So completely was Blind Man's Gap concealed by the hidden gateway that not more than a dozen white men knew of its existence. All of these were outlaws—horsethieves, cattle duffers and bushrangers.

For six or seven miles cliffs enclosed the dry river bed, the walls rising in places to a height of three hundred feet. Up the gradual ascent Blake rode, until he came out of the gorge into a wooded park which lay before him—miles of hills folding one into another, beautiful as the estate of an English landed proprietor in Surrey. Interspersed with the rolling upland were grassy valleys, small canyons and unexpected pockets at the foot of rocky bluffs. But the more rugged details were lost in the sweep of the land waves.

The park was bisected by the river bed and quartered by a rocky ridge running at right angles to it. The nomadic inhabitants of the retreat tacitly respected squatters' rights. There was room enough for all of them, so they did not need to crowd one another

Lynch and his men had the southeastern block nearest to the gateway. The habitat of the Haxon gang was the rougher and more picturesque section close to the north wall boundary. Except for the one time when the two leaders had met to arrange title to their respective holdings Blake had not seen Lynch since the day of the raid upon the chain gang. Nor did he want to meet him or to become in any way

identified with any of his savage exploits. Continually he impressed upon his followers the lesson that they could survive only by building up good will among the cockatoo settlers, the shanty keepers, the kangarooers and the swagmen.

The Haxon gang paid well for all the supplies needed. No sheepshearer, rail splitter, or any other workman was ever robbed by it. More than once Blake had swept down with his armed riders and driven away a bunch of raiding blacks from the run of a poor squatter. Always he explained cynically that he adopted this policy for entirely selfish reasons.

Occasionally some horsethief drifted across the ridge to borrow tobacco from the Haxon gang or to reclaim a stray mount; but the two groups of bushrangers let each other strictly alone. Blake suspected that Lynch was jealous of him because of his reputation for daring and successful stickups.

As the outlaw drew near the camp he saw a drift of smoke rising from the gum trees. No doubt Wirra was making tea in front of the wurleys. But as usual he raised a cooey to let his comrades know of his arrival. The answer came; a double cooey followed by a single one.

The men in camp were extremely glad to see him. They were always worried by these lonely expeditions of their chief, for they knew he might be killed or captured on any of them. But they were aware that protest was of no avail. He would go his own way.

"We were beginning to think they had nabbed you," Robbins said, as he took the stallion from his leader.

"No. Had a brush with three constables this morning at the Ross shanty. They had old Tiptop there in the pound."

"How did you get him back?" Burke asked.

Blake grinned with reminiscent amusement.

"Talked 'em out of him."

"Didn't they know the horse? He has been described in the papers a dozen times."

"They knew the horse, but they didn't know me."

"You've been described too, oftener than Tiptop."

"I persuaded them I was the new deputy commissioner, Hetherington. You may have observed, Pat, that the average human mind is capable of holding only one idea at a time. So I filled the constables with annoyance at my damned supercilious manner. While they were still resenting this I said goodby. Anything new here?"

"Nothing. Lynch and his followers are back in the Gap. Got in last night. We saw smoke from their camp this morning. Must have brought a lot of liquor back with them. They've been shouting and shooting all over the place."

"One of these days they won't come back, and we'll read in the papers subsequently of how Messrs. Lynch, Hawkes and Company were hanged on Gallows Hill after expressing repentance and professing religion."

"Good riddance, too," Robbins said with energy. "I'd give the scoundrel up myself if I thought I could do it without getting caught."

"Exactly what Lynch thinks about us," Blake said dryly.

Wirra came running forward, black face beaming. His *poonarie* always brought him some glittering trinket after a prolonged absence.

"In that right saddlebag, Wirra," his master said carelessly. "Have you been a good boy?"

"Velly good. Catchum tea always."

From the saddlebag the black boy drew a chain of large glass beads. His eyes gleamed with delight. He looked at the beads, bit them, put them in his mouth, then held them up to the sun.

"I expect you'll be giving them to a gin," Blake said.

Mention of a gin was a sure-fire joke with Wirra. He exploded with mirth, as though his laughter were set on a hair trigger. The slat ribs shook, the little eyes vanished, and cataracts of discord poured from the throat.

"Wirra no catchum gin. No likee. Must give gin whip all time. Maybe drown."

"I've heard you suggest that before, Wirra. Better forget that little custom of yours. It's not done in the best white

society."

"You no whip either?" the black boy asked anxiously. "How you boss white gin?"

"Personally, I don't. Like you, I let 'em alone. I think the recommended method is a form of moral suasion. They get beads and damper and an occasional *corroboree** when they behave. When they don't behave—they get them anyhow."

Blake walked across to his wurley and disappeared within it.

GEOFFREY BLAKE had a taste for indolence, a reaction perhaps from the years when he had been hard driven by the lash of an overseer's whip. He could lie for hours in the sun, or in the shade of a gum tree during the heat of the day, reading one of Disraeli's or Bulwer-Lytton's novels, with frequent intervals when he leaned back, eyes half closed, and let casual thoughts happen lazily.

Lawbreaker though he was, with a price on his head, he was far easier in mind than he had been for years. His cynicism still cropped out, but the old bitterness was no longer there. It was not necessary now to fight savagely against the circumstances of his environment. The philosophy of hate he had so cherished was crumbling.

The pleasant hours of loafing in the sunshine, the sting of the wind in his face as he rode the hills, long nights by the camp-fire under the stars—all these had done their share to modify his resentment. But more than any of these the fine, direct eyes of a girl had challenged his destructive philosophy. In the clear atmosphere of her brave faith it had been unable to survive.

The days slid into weeks; the weeks became a month. A second month followed the first. Burke and Robbins were quite content to lie doggo, venturing out only once or twice to buy supplies from an old sundowner who could be trusted. It was an easy life. They hunted a good deal and slept a lot. Sometimes they played cards. It was for their chief to tell them it was time for another raid. They had observed this lassitude in him before after a couple of weeks of hard riding. Some day he would shake it off, his voice would ring out an order to saddle, and they would be off to bail up another mail coach, some rich station, or even a small town.

One night Wirra awoke his *poonarie* from deep sleep.

"More better you know, big fella boss, heap lot fire in bush."

Blake jumped up.

"What's that you say?" he asked.

Wirra pointed to the southeast. A red glow was in the sky. The leap of flames could be seen.

"It's in the gap—over in Lynch's run," the bushranger cried. "Wake Burke and Robbins. I'll bring in the horses."

Within a few minutes the three white men were in the saddle and riding toward the fire. It was a night of many stars and a silvery light sprayed the scrub through which they rode. At the foot of the ridge Robbins pulled up.

"We can't reach the shanty by following our usual pad, Cap," he said. "The blooming fire will cut us off. We've got to swing round and cross close to the boundary cliffs. That way we'll come on it from the rear."

"True enough," Blake agreed. "You lead the way, old-timer. It will be a bit of tough going even with the stars; but if any one can get us there it will be you."

"We'll make it to the bluff back of the cabin, though wot the 'ell you can do when we get there I wouldn't like to say. Last night, when I 'eard those wild devils of Lynch 'itting it up I says to myself, 'Look out for fireworks.' I've been expecting them to singe their own tails."

"Lucky for us the fire can't jump the ridge. They won't singe us any, glory be." This from Burke.

"If we go any nearer the blooming thing we'll burn ourselves, though," Robbins grumbled. "Do you hear it roar? Wonder if the poor coves got out before it started."

"Unless they were caught asleep they must have escaped," Blake said.

"Or drunk," Burke added.

The sundowner led them along the

*A *corroboree* was a kind of camp meeting at which the natives danced and feasted to their hearts' content.

foot of the ridge almost to the barrier wall, then put his horse to the steep ascent. It was rough going. As the horses clambered from rock to rock the muscles of their legs stood out. There was a good deal of rubble. At times the animals started to slither down and had to reach for new footholds.

The path swung up a chimney so narrow that the riders could have touched both walls with their hands. It was steep and full of boulders.

"Like the wall of a cobblestone house, begorry," Burke called up to Robbins reproachfully. "What have ye got against me and the chief, man?"

Robbins put his horse at the finish with a rush. The gelding went down to his knees, heaved himself up again and pawed a way to the apex of the ridge. The other two followed.

From the summit they could see the fire below them. It was running furiously through the scrub, a long, irregular line of red, crouched menace that now and again pounced forward like a leaping wild beast.

While the riders watched it for a moment three or four figures broke out of the scrub and ran toward the boundary cliffs.

"They're trapped," Robbins cried.

Blake took in the picture with one sweeping glance.

"Perhaps not, if they head for the foot of the big butte," he said, and put his horse into motion at once.

"They can't climb it. If they get up twenty or thirty feet the fire will run up the scrub and lick them off like flies."

"That's what we brought the rope for, Robbins. Come on. If we can beat the fire to the bluff we can save them."

BLAKE dropped down the ridge swiftly, the stallion half the time sliding almost on its haunches. He reached the mesa and raced along it toward the bluff. To Robbins he had spoken confidently, but there was no assurance in his heart. The roar and crackle of the fire were dreadful to hear. Nothing in the path of that sweeping monster could survive. As he galloped forward he could feel the heat of it on his face.

At the edge of the bluff he pulled up and dismounted. He caught sight of the beleagered men. They had swung around the bluff to a spot for the moment more sheltered from the bush fire.

Blake cupped his mouth with his hands and gave a loud cooey. In the fury of the fire the sound of his voice was swallowed up. He called again. So did Robbins, who had a voice like the bull of Bashan.

The trapped men were trying frantically to climb the cliff. None of them heard the shouts of those above, but the nearest man, glancing round in terror at the fire, caught sight of the three on the bluff.

With gestures Blake urged them to come back to the bluff and try the climb there. The four outlaws consulted for a moment, slid down the few feet of rock wall they had climbed, and came scuttling back through the brush for all the world like frightened rabbits.

To his waist Blake tied one end of the rope.

"I'm going down as far as I can," he explained. "If they can get up part way there's a chance the rope may reach them."

"Gawd's sake, don't slip, Cap," Robbins urged.

"No. Have the other rope ready to help us if we reach that ledge down there."

Already Blake had slipped over the edge and was feeling with his feet for a foothold. His companions lowered him for the first twenty feet, then had to let go the rope. As he descended he could see those below trying desperately to ascend the bluff. The heat beat on him in waves, sometimes so intensely that he had to shield his face with his arms until the fury of it had passed.

He reached the ledge and tossed one end of the rope down. The leading climber reached for it, and at the same moment a spar of rock gave way beneath his feet. He plunged to the foot of the cliff, tried to rise, and stumbled back. He had broken his leg.

Watching impotently from above, Burke gave a cry of dismay. The man was lost.

The bushranger, Hawkes, caught the

end of the rope and with its aid and such footholds as he could find dragged himself to the ledge. Without waiting to ask if he could help, he went clambering up the second half of the climb. Lynch was the next to reach the rope and the ledge.

The third man hesitated, looked down at the injured man, and decided he could do nothing for him. The heat was so terrific that he felt he could not endure it long. He caught the rope and was dragged to the ledge.

The rescued man looked up. Hawkes was already safe on the bluff, and Lynch had hold of the second rope. He looked down at the poor fellow trapped below, who was crying pitifully for them not to desert him.

"Nothing we can do for Ned?" he asked, shuddering.

"I'm going to have a try," Blake said, "if you'll stick it here and stand by."

"I'll do it, mate," the man promised.

"It will be hell. Can I trust you?"

A cloud of smoke rolled up at them. From the midst of it the man gasped—

"Yes."

Blake was unfastening the rope from his waist. He tied it around the outlaw whom he had just dragged from the fire and went down it hand over hand. When he had reached the end of the rope he searched for foot and hand holds in the rough gneiss. He climbed down a dozen feet, missed a grip and plunged down. Shaken but not seriously hurt, he rose to his feet at once.

The heat was almost unendurable. He turned his back on it and spoke to the man on the ground.

"You'll have to help."

"Save me," the injured man pleaded.

"If you'll help. You go first. I'll give you a boost when I can."

Fortunately the injured man was small. Even so, when Blake had to support the weight which the broken leg refused, it was more than once a near thing whether both of them would go down into the fire already licking in close to the foot of the bluff.

They reached the end of the rope. Ned caught it and was dragged to the ledge, while Blake covered up and endured a torment of heat. The rope came down again. Geoffrey went up like a trained athlete.

"Stout fellow," he panted, speaking to the man with the rope. "You first. Ned next. I'll come last. We've got to give him a hand."

Somehow they did it, got him to the end of the rope held by Burke and Robbins. To this they tied him.

The heat here was not so intense, though it was bad enough and rolled up in waves. From the clouds of smoke pouring up the wall they had to protect themselves as best they could. To the tortured men the moments dragged into minutes before the rope came dangling down again.

"You next," Blake said to his companion.

Desperately Geoffrey Blake clung to the outcroppings of feldspar. His head was swimming. His body seemed to be floating away. Grimly he set his teeth and waited.

The noose swung past him. He caught it on the return swing. A minute later he stood in safety on the bluff.

"Gorry, boss, why did you do it?" Burke asked. "You won only by an eyelash, man."

Blake's cynical grin was feeble.

"Curiosity, Pat. A little foretaste of my future down there. I wanted to see how I was going to like it."

He moved, a little drunkenly, toward the stallion and leaned for support against the saddle. Presently he lifted his head.

"We'd better be getting away from here," he said.

Robbins and Burke lifted Ned to the saddle of one of the horses. Burke rode beside the man to steady him.

His chief mounted and led the way. The other three rescued men staggered after them.

## CHAPTER XX

### LYNCH GETS A BOXING LESSON

WIRRA poured flour on the inside of a piece of bark, put in a dash of soda and another dash of cream of tartar, and mixed them well. He added water and stirred the flour. In a few minutes this would be damper

fresh from the coals. He heated the salt beef stew left from the night before and then made tea. Tin plates he scattered here and there.

Presently he rose from his crouched position before the camp-fire, expanded his washboard ribs and, with a guffaw of laughter, made an announcement.

"Bleakfast him leady." Lest this should be insufficient, he added a rider, "Come catchum."

The man with the broken leg sat near the fire.

"That'll bring 'em," he predicted.

They came with a rush, all of them but Blake. Wirra dished the stew for them and passed to each a billy of tea. The damper he had already cut into slices. Most of the men ate ravenously, as though they did not expect to see food soon again. It was a habit they had learned on the chain.

From his humpy Blake emerged. In spite of the shortage of water he contrived somehow to look immaculate. As he strolled leisurely forward he heard Lynch's heavy voice.

" —Have to throw in with you for awhile, since we're on the wallaby,* as you might say."

He ended with a stream of curses at the fire which had destroyed their supplies.

Blake did not at once set Lynch right in his assumption that he was to be a more or less permanent guest. He said, "Good morning," accepted a billikin and a plate from Wirra, and sat down crosslegged to eat. The place he chose was a few feet distant from the others.

"You must have been on a real beano," Burke said.

The Irishman winked at Robbins. He was suggesting indirectly that fires in the brush are usually lighted before they burn.

Not until breakfast was finished did Blake make his careless, matter-of-fact correction.

"You'll be wanting to set up camp for yourselves, of course," he said. "Afraid we haven't any blueys to lend you. We can just manage one extra for your wounded man. But we can let you have supplies for three or four days until you get some in from outside."

Lynch looked at him sullenly. He never had liked this flash busher who set up to be a gentleman.

"Don't want us here, eh?"

"We can't weave blankets out of wattles or make flour out of sand," Blake said lightly.

He did not take the trouble either to deny or admit the other's charge. Lynch could take his answer as it stood.

"Our horses pulled their picket pins and bolted," the big ruffian growled. "We'll have to take yours to muster them."

Blake smiled ironically. He thought he could see himself turning over his stallion to this fellow, or any of the other mounts for that matter. What chance, he wondered, of having them returned?

"You're hardly fit for hard riding yet," he said. "Take it easy around the camp and rest. My boys will run your stock up for you. Eh, Burke?"

"Right you are, boss," Burke said with a grin.

He knew exactly what was behind the spoken words.

"What about Ned Trevor here?" Hawkes asked sulkily. "Are you kicking him out too?"

"You still call a spade a spade, Mr. Hawkes, I see. But why any hard feelings? You have your way and we have ours. They don't march together, so we'll agree to disagree. As for your friend, Trevor, I think he'll have to stay for a time. Since there's no better at hand, I'll have to be his doctor if he can stand it."

"I'll do that, and say thanks to you, sir," Trevor spoke up heartily.

Hawkes glowered at the camp-fire.

"Your ways never did suit me," he said sourly, after a moment of hesitation.

Blake understood it was *his* ways that were obnoxious.

"That's my misfortune, isn't it?" he said, with no evident depression of spirit.

Burke bristled up, even though his chief did not.

"Nobody would expect you to like

*A man was "on the wallaby" when he was looking for a job or for some reason was at loose ends without a fixed abode.

'em, not after he mauled you one night till you cried enough after he stopped you from bullying a sick boy. That's the reason, you yellow dingo, you don't like him. Begorry, there's no gratitude in you, after he went down to hell for you and dragged you back."

"He passed me the end of a rope, if that's what you mean."

Tarcoola Jack, the man who had lowered the lifeline to Blake and Trevor, objected sharply.

"Man, you make me ashamed of being your running mate. He saved our lives, every one of us. What's ailing you, Hawkes?"

"If you think I'm ailing, Jack, you can put up your dukes and find out what it is," Hawkes challenged.

Blake held up a protesting hand and offered ironical advice to Tarcoola Jack.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath. Let us not forget, gentlemen, that we are all members of the same honorable profession."

The man with the broken leg added his word for peace.

"He's right, Mr. Haxon is. All of us were lags and now all of us are bushrangers. If we're caught, we'll be scragged. The thing is to stick together. I don't mean in the same camp. I mean we mustn't have rows."

"Quite right," agreed Blake, and on his face was the characteristic sardonic smile. "We mustn't forget the close ties that bind us. You recollect how Barrington, our own poet, has expressed it.

"True patriots we, for be it understood
We left our country for our country's good.

"That must be our proud boast, gentlemen of the bush."

"That's all tripe," Lynch said with blunt discourtesy. "I'm a plain man, I am, and no gammon. They say I'm the worst devil that's ever been loose in the bush. I'll make 'em think so before I'm through."

He stressed his threat with a string of foul profanity. It was his way of emphasizing his superiority to this swell with the flash talk.

"You make your position quite clear, Mr. Lynch," the other leader said with mocking urbanity.

"First we'll borrow from you some guns and ammunition," Lynch announced dogmatically. "We got caught and had to jump so that we didn't save a thing. Only two pistols among us."

"No guns, no ammunition," Blake said immediately and decisively. "We have none to spare."

Lynch gave him a black look.

"I said I wanted to borrow 'em only."

"And I said we don't lend our weapons," Blake replied placidly.

The huge bushranger in the red checked shirt stroked his long, abundant black beard. His pig eyes grew smaller. Rage blazed in them.

"What d'ye mean? Got to have guns, haven't we? What d'you think we can do?"

"You might go and get some if you need them," his host said lightly. "But, of course, that's your business, Mr. Lynch."

"And what if we met a mob of traps while we were getting 'em?" Lynch demanded.

"That would be unfortunate, for you or for the traps, wouldn't it?"

"I thought you claimed you were our friend," Lynch snarled, scowling at the other.

"Oh, no. I don't have friends, and if I did I would be particular who they are," Blake replied with bland insolence.

The big ruffian poured forth another stream of curses.

"For a brass farthing, Mr. Flash Cove, I'd show you who's cock of the walk," he boasted.

Blake did not lift his undisturbed eyes from the furious man.

"Not to deprive you of any legitimate pleasure, I'll ask Burke to pass over to you a brass farthing if he has one," he said quietly.

Into his pocket Burke's hand dived. He drew out some coins, chose one and tossed it into the air so that it dropped in front of Lynch.

The big bushranger glared at the farthing, then at the man who had so casually accepted his challenge. His face had grown purple with anger, but even while he nursed the passion a bell of warning rang inside him.

"Is it a fight you're asking for?" he

roared.

"I think *you* mentioned something of the sort."

"Do you mean with our maulers?"

"Suit yourself, Mr. Lynch."

The ruffian did not like the look in that cold, hard eye. He was not exactly afraid, but he had an odd feeling that he had met his master. That Haxon was a dead shot was countryside talk. No, it was not good enough. He sidestepped a duel. Better stick to a rough and tumble, in which he was sure he could smash this swell to smithereens.

"Man, I can eat you alive!" he bragged.

BLAKE rose, unstrapped his belt and handed it to Robbins. For an instant the other man was tempted to drag out his derringer and blaze away. His foe was unarmed, and he could not miss. But by the same token neither could Burke and Robbins. He would be at their mercy, and they would shoot him down. To Hawkes he passed his weapon.

Lynch was uncouth as a Rocky Mountain grizzly bear. He had the same look of muscle-bound awkwardness. His strength was tremendous. Never yet had he met a man whom he could not crush in his grip. As he moved forward, great hairy arms hanging by his sides, a curious snarling sound came from his throat. It died, from sheer amazement.

For Blake had landed heavily twice, on the jaw and on the left eye, before he had time to raise his arms, and had stepped aside swiftly to avoid his savage rush. He turned and plunged, head down, arms flailing. His nimble antagonist ducked, danced to one side, and made his ears ring with a clout on the head.

It was not a fight but a slaughter. Lynch was bewildered by the swiftness of the attack. He seemed to be the focus of half a dozen flying fists. His own blows struck empty air, were warded aside, or were deftly smothered. That he telegraphed every move he did not know, any more than he could understand why his great hands could not close on that lithe, supple body and crush it. All his frantic efforts were frustrated. The man he fought with was not there, yet he was there every instant. Clean, hard blows crashed home, on ribs and cheek and chin and nose. Every time Lynch charged it was into a jolt or an uppercut traveling fast his way.

The big man's face was a map of cuts and bruises. One eye was shut and the other was closing. His head was singing an anvil chorus. He felt groggy, and when he lunged he staggered. Yet no matter how severe the punishment, he managed to keep on his feet.

Blake watched his chance. He thudded a left to the eye and followed it in, slipping his hip back of that of his foe. The crook of the arm garroted the hairy throat of Lynch, who felt himself being lifted backward. A moment, and the big man was flung heavily to the ground. He lay there, all the breath shaken out of him.

With a whoop of enthusiasm Burke flung his hat to the ground.

"I've never seen the match of him," he cried. "Begorry, I'd back him against Bendigo for all I've got. He's the prettiest boxer ever was, and he fights like a lion. There's not the beat of him in all the world. There's three of you here now can swear to that."

As soon as Blake had recovered breath he gave orders.

"Get out of here, Lynch. I'll not have you around. We'll muster your horses and send them to you with rations enough to last you three days."

Lynch rose slowly.

"This ain't over with," he said huskily as he turned away.

Hawkes followed him. Tarcoola Jack lingered. He walked up to Blake.

"By gad, you're a man!" he said. "My belly's full of Lynch. Will you take me on? Will you let me join your gang?"

"How long have you been with Lynch?"

"Not three weeks, boss. I'm a runaway from Featherstone's station. Black Tom was killed and I took his place in the Lynch gang."

"Have you been in on any of his murders?"

"No. All we've done is to stick up

a public house and a supply train. Nobody was hurt."

Blake looked hard at the man, sizing him up. He had stood firm last night on the ledge when desertion would have meant death for two men, and he had done it at the risk of his own life.

"We'll have to vote on it," the leader of the bushrangers said. "But first I'd better make it clear to you that I'm chief. I make the final decisions. This isn't a go-as-you-please gang. Some one has to crack the whip, unless we're all to get nabbed, so I do it."

"Wouldn't ask for any one better," Jack said promptly.

"When I say jump, you jump."

Jack grinned.

"Right, Captain."

The three members of the Haxon gang drew aside.

"Want to write your votes?" Blake asked.

"Not I," Robbins answered. "This cove's all right."

"Suits me," Burke added. "I vote yes."

"You won't regret it," Tarcoola Jack promised, after he had been told the decision.

"You see that we don't," Blake said quietly.

Robbins and Burke set out to muster the horses that had been stampeded by the fire. While they were away Blake cleaned and oiled his weapons, as he was accustomed to do at least once a week.

He carried an old sawed-off musket and two Colt cap-and-ball revolvers. After he had finished with them he took from his swag two extra cylinders for the American guns. Each chamber he loaded with percussion cap, powder and ball. By means of the lever ramrod hinged under the barrel the lead was seated against the powder.

When the cylinders were loaded he dipped them in warm beeswax to keep the powder dry. If he should get into a pinch in which it would be necessary to fire a great many shots, he could send twenty-four in an almost continuous stream, since it would take only a few moments to insert a loaded cylinder after the first had been emptied. The revolvers were single action, cocked by the thumb after each discharge, with the trigger notch filed down so that the hammer fell as soon as released.

Toward the middle of the afternoon those in camp heard the explosive crack of stock whips. Into a pound, enclosed on three sides by the boundary walls and on the fourth by a makeshift fence, Burke and Robbins drove the mustered horses.

To the injured man Blake offered an option.

"If you'd rather join your partners, just say the word. We'll get you to their camp."

Trevor looked at him, alarm flickering in his eyes.

"You said I could stay here, boss. Don't send me back. Either one of those devils would knock me in the head quicker'n you could bat an eye if the constables crowded them, an' I know it."

"I guessed as much," Blake said dryly. "You may stay along with us if you'd rather."

Enough provisions were set aside to last the two outlaws three days. These were packed on one of the two horses to be returned to them.

Robbins was a wise old sundowner, but his chief gave him a word of warning.

"Don't go close to their camp," he advised. "And stay in the open. Call to them and make them come to you. They're both in an ugly mood. If you gave them a chance they might stick you up and rob you of your horses and guns."

"If they can get 'em they are welcome to 'em," Robbins said grimly, for he was without fear.

An hour later the two bushrangers returned.

"Did they say thank you for all our kindness?" Blake asked with his satiric smile.

"If they did I didn't hear it," Burke replied with a grin. "Both of them did a good deal of cursing. They didn't take kindly to Tarcoola Jack joining up with us. If they can get you, boss, they'll do it."

Blake kept a guard posted in camp that night and during all the subsequent ones they spent in the Gap.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MARY PROPOUNDS A THEORY

THAT Haxon had turned killer came to the colony almost as a shock. If in trying to escape while hard pressed he had shot down a constable, many of his admirers would have made excuses for him, since this was a sporting chance every trooper in the bush took. But cruel and cold-blooded murder was something different. The bushranger's reputation as a Robin Hood was destroyed. Among stockmen when they met, at shanties where sheepshearers knocked down their checks, at the Café Parisien and the Royal Hotel in Sydney, no other subject of conversation could vie with this. Men who had not subscribed to the popular romantic verdict of him said cynically—

"I told you so."

Those who had viewed his career with friendly tolerance found no adequate answer. For he had murdered twice, unnecessarily, with appalling ferocity.

Killough made the most of this new development. To a reporter of a Sydney paper he told about the murder for which Haxon had been transported. He repeated it at teas, in his club, to anybody who would listen.

The first of these new murderous outbreaks occurred after the stickup of a train of bullock drays. For no apparent reason the master of the wagons was lashed to a tree and shot to death. There were four of the bushrangers, all masked. Because of the clothes he wore the leader had been recognized as Haxon. To make identification sure, one of the outlaws had let slip Haxon's name in speaking to him. All of the bandits had been roaring drunk.

Within two weeks the same gang had raided McQuirk's road camp, helped itself to supplies, and left the overseer, Atkins, for dead. The masked leader had boasted openly that he was Haxon just before he shot down the ticket-of-leave man. Riding back to the bush after this exploit, the four rangers had stopped at an outback humpy and bailed up an inoffensive old Scotch shepherd. To force him to reveal the hiding place of his savings they had tortured and then killed him.

All over New South Wales the word went that Haxon must be destroyed. The best black trailers were brought in by the police. For Haxon the reward was raised from five hundred to a thousand pounds. Squatters organized hunts and assisted the constables in every way possible. Even the shanty keepers and cattle duffers turned against the bushrangers. They were afraid this cry of vengeance might include all lawbreakers. Already the demand was for the capture or extermination of the Lynch gang as well as that of Haxon.

Halliday and Stuart were both much distressed. That Blake was hard as ironbark they knew. But this inhuman cruelty puzzled them. It did not seem in character. These recent crimes had of course shattered any possible hope there might have been for a pardon.

With two of her brothers Mary McQueen rode over to the Stuart station on a matter of business for their father. The blue eyes of the big, bronzed, fair haired man warmed at sight of the girl. He strode forward, the auburn beard flowing over his broad chest.

"Welcome," he cried. "We'll have tea under the vines of the Summer house."

"Can't be too soon for us, Jim," Mary answered.

He lifted her from the horse.

"And now I'm going to scold you," he said cheerfully. "I'm glad you're here, and when you go I'll see you home. But you ought not to leave the station while this murderous blackguard is on the loose. It's not safe to travel."

"Is it safe to stay at home?" Mary asked. "How long ago is it since the Lynch gang bailed up the Fuller station and locked up the women? It might be our turn next."

"That's true, and with no servant handy to turn you loose at the right time. But I was thinking of the other ruffian, not Lynch. To let him bamboozle me with his fine talk. My word, I was a fool. And the beggar sat there on the pound fence not sixty yards from me—with his back to the house, the impudent scamp, inviting me to take a potshot at him. Did I do it? No, be-

cause he had gammoned me into thinking he was a decent chap."

"Did Lynch sit on a fence with his back to you?" Mary asked innocently.

"I'm not talking about Lynch but the other villain—Haxon, or Blake, or whatever you want to call him."

"Why not try using your brains, Jim, if any?" Mary said saucily.

"What do you mean?" Stuart asked.

Ted McQueen explained.

"Mary thinks Haxon didn't do these murders, Jim."

"He hadn't any more to do with them than I had," the girl said sharply.

Stuart looked at her, astonished.

"He was identified, by his description. What's more, he admitted it himself when he shot down the overseer."

"Wasn't that a strange thing for him to do, since he was masked and evidently didn't want to be known?"

"Y-yes, except that chaps like Haxon aren't always consistent. He wanted to brag. He wanted this Atkins to know who was shooting him."

"Geoffrey Blake struck you as a braggart, did he?"

"No, he didn't. Tom Halliday and I were talking it over. We are both puzzled. I suppose the explanation is that his real nature has come out and that he's let himself go bad."

"That's absurd, Jim. He's the same man who offered to take a flogging for his friend, the same one who didn't shoot Henry Killough when he had a chance after all that his cousin has done to him."

"You mean—having him flogged?"

"No, I mean something a hundred times worse than that. If I could tell you—but I can't. Yet I'll say one thing. Geoffrey Blake didn't kill the man for whose murder he was transported."

Jim stared at her.

"Is that a guess?"

"No, it's not a guess. I know it."

"Some one has been talking after he gave his word to keep still."

"What do you mean?" Mary's eyes fastened to his. "Do you know something too, Jim?"

"I know what you know—and what you haven't any right to know yet."

Mary frowned. There was a puzzle here. They were talking at cross purposes, but she did not wait to untangle the threads.

"It doesn't matter how we know it. Anyhow, that's not the point now, Jim. What I say is that he couldn't have committed these horrible crimes any more than you could."

"You're pitching the evidence overboard, are you?"

"No. I'm taking a look at it before I swallow it whole."

"For instance?"

"It's strange that Haxon has always been identified by the clothes he wears and never by the fine horse he rides. Nobody seems to have noticed the thoroughbred on these last raids, but always before this everybody did."

Stuart had not thought of this. But he recognized it as a valid point.

"True enough. He must have been riding another horse."

"Some one must," she corrected. "Another thing—I notice three or four people speak of him as being such a big man. Geoffrey Blake isn't so big. He isn't as big as you are."

"They were frightened and he looked big to them."

"But he didn't look particularly big to me and to the men in the bank."

"He wasn't on a killing rampage then."

"All the drivers agree that when he stuck up the bullock drays he and all his men were drunk. But one of the persistent stories about him is that he never drinks and never lets his men touch a drop. Twenty men bailed up by him in public houses and coaches have testified to this. He's almost a fanatic on the subject."

"Men who are afraid of themselves with drink sometimes are. He may have broken over and let go of himself," the squatter suggested.

"Now look at the other side," Mary said quietly. "All of this murdering, the brutality and braggadocio of it, fits in with what we know of Lynch. He has been doing this very kind of thing for two years. It's exactly what we'd expect of him, isn't it?"

"Yes," Stuart admitted. "By George—it might be Lynch!"

TO BE CONTINUED

# THE SHOOTING of JOHNNY CORBEAU

By JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

*Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake.*
—ST. PAUL

OUR friend Xavier O'Keefe had come into the old French Market Coffee House by the New Orleans waterfront, very drunk and hostile. He tried to pick a fight with a waiter, which is not a sensible or safe thing to do. If the waiter does not beat you up—as he very well may—the police will probably throw you in jail, and a New Orleans hoosegow is a bad place.

It would have been unpleasant to see a friend get himself in trouble, so Campbell walked over in his offhand, absent minded sort of way and hit Xavier on the chin. We put him in a taxi and took him home to bed.

Campbell's negro cook and housekeeper had left a glowing bed of coals in the small grate. They threw a circle of heat out into the high, dim room of his flat in the old French Quarter; pleasant, for the damp air of New Orleans has a raw chill, even in March.

We warmed our hands and lighted Campbell's cigars, which were good. Everything he ate, smoked, or drank was good. Campbell liked living, and made the necessities of existence pleasures. The firelight made a red shine on the barrels of his guns, which were also good, and an ornament to the room because he liked guns. His ruddy, pleasant face caught the firelight, too, and he seemed to be smiling at some thought as he spread his big hands to the heat.

"O'Keefe," he said, "is a fool and a nuisance. He and his kind don't know how to drink, and so people get the notion that nobody should drink. Not the Louisianans, God forbid, but our good friends up North where John Barleycorn was born after ten nights in a barroom.

"I'm an unmoral man, and my notions will never get me elected to Congress, but I hope never to wet my throat again if a man too sober is not more dangerous than a man too drunk. I never see a fool like O'Keefe, or read of some terrible crime like a dry Senator being caught with a bottle in his suitcase, but what I think of William, the time he went gunning for Johnny Corbeau."

Little blue-green flames ran over the coal with a chuckling sound. Camp-

bell's blue-green eyes were laughing back at the fire.

"Well?" I said. "What about William?"

TILL he was twenty-five [Campbell began] William had never taken a drink, dealt a hand of cards or kissed any one but his sister. Life to William was a lean, serious business, and duty was sacred.

Now, when a man like that goes out to kill, he goes seriously and is very likely to do somebody great harm with a bullet. William was a grim lad when he took the boat downriver—you know where they tie up, just down from the Customs House—and grimmer still when he landed on the levee seventy miles below. He spoke to no one. The other passengers were all below, drinking coffee with the cook, or gossiping with the captain up beside the wheelhouse. But not William. He sat huddled inside his overcoat and watched the gray river go by, feeling now and again of the pistol in his pocket.

Whoever said that a man will see what he expects to see, was right. William was looking for people sprung from a she-wolf for dam and a Congo snake for sire. He'd made inquiries in New Orleans, do you see? And somebody had filled him full of stories about the Cajuns; dirty, thieving, murdering, lying, inbred, drunken and meaner than original sin. You know what some people think.

The crowd on the wharf wasn't any cleaner than you expect fishermen and trappers to be; and they did look William over pretty carefully. He was a stranger, in shiny store clothes, and they didn't know what he had come for. For all they knew he might be a game commissioner, or something. Looking at them from the deck, William read everything from fish stealing to mayhem in their faces.

He took a good grip on the automatic in his pocket and went ashore. Old Man Giles was down tending to the mail; and Old Man Giles might pass for a good natured preacher, if you don't catch the look in his eye and the veins in his nose. William followed the mail sacks into the combined store and post office, and stood around. The mail boat crew went off for its afternoon drink, and pretty soon Giles popped his head up from behind the counter and asked William if he wanted something.

"I want to see a man called John Corbeau," William said, still holding tight to his gun. "I'm told he lives here."

Old Man Giles blinked at William through his eyeglasses.

"Johnny Corbeau?" he said. "You mean the guide, I guess. I don't know if he's home or not, but I'll show you his house."

They went across the flat yard in front of the post office, and up on the levee. Giles pointed out a boathouse and some big willow trees.

"There's a big bend right there," he said. "Johnny Corbeau's house is the third one beyond. Blue house with a red roof; the only one that's painted fresh. Johnny's a bachelor, but he keeps his place up."

William thanked Old Man Giles kindly and set off down the road, ducking his head into the wind and holding his hat on. It was about this time of year, with a norther blowing itself out. The sun had begun to shine an hour before, but William thought he'd never seen such a desolate, inhospitable place in his life. The river was big and wild. The houses looked small and poor, and back beyond he could see the cane brake and the swamp. No decent people could live in such a place. If they weren't bad by nature, they'd get mean and ugly just staying here.

HE CAME to the boathouse and counted three houses beyond the bend. The trunks of the orange trees were whitewashed, and no weeds grew under them. The house itself glittered with its new blue paint. White shutters were fastened across the front windows. But none of this meant a thing to William.

He went up to the front door and pounded with his left fist. His right hand was half out of his overcoat pocket, holding the gun with the safety off. He was not trembling, but his breath came a little short. William had come to the moment. For months he'd been

planning for it, living for it. He'd traveled the thousand-odd miles from St. Louis with no other thought in his mind. He was going to shoot this man down like a dog.

No one answered his pounding. William knocked again, then stepped back from the door so Corbeau would have no chance to grab his gun before he fired. He listened for a footstep, or some sound to tell him the man was coming. But no sound came.

William hadn't planned for this. He had imagined confronting the small, snake-like guide and having it over with. Then he thought Corbeau must be hiding—lying low till he could get a shot from behind. William waited a minute more, then tiptoed off the porch and around to the side. The shutters were closed there, too.

But at the back, there was only glass. William looked in and saw a kitchen. It was clean, but empty. Behind the house was a thin fringe of orange trees, then some ploughed fields, then the solid wall of cane hiding the swamp. He could see nobody out there, either. He beat a tattoo on the door and stepped back, feeling a little angry and a little bit foolish.

He was still watching the door when he heard a sound like a foot breaking a dry branch. William whirled round. The next minute he fired at a man who stood watching him from the shadow of an orange tree.

Now William could shoot. Since the Fall before he had been practising at ranges up to fifty yards with the outline of a man for a target. He could put six shots in a five-inch circle around the heart any time he felt like it. But he had done his shooting in a basement, with overhead lights arranged to give perfect visibility. A quick shot where leaves cut the light into moving patterns is not the same thing. Also, a man may move.

William's bullet struck an orange tree, and then hands seemed to tighten on his throat. He couldn't move or speak. His knees weakened at the hinges. This man was tall, broad shouldered, deep chested. He was the wrong man.

For a minute they stood looking at each other across the thirty feet between. William still gripped the pistol, but the man took a step forward. He had on hip boots and carried a shotgun in the crook of one arm. There was a paddle in his other hand, and a string of ducks across his shoulder. His weatherbeaten face looked good natured, even to William.

"Be careful how you do with that gun," he said. "You will hurt somebody."

William drew a bead on his heart, saying:

"Stay right where you are. I thought you were somebody else. I'm sorry I shot at you. But don't move, please."

"I am no fool. You are nervous with that gun, man. If you don't want for shoot me, put it down."

"And give you a chance to take it away from me? I'm not a fool, either. You're going to stay right here where I can keep you covered till the man I want comes back. Take your gun by the barrel and put it down."

The man leaned his gun against an orange tree.

"I feel sorry for that man," he said. "Who is he?"

William hesitated a minute, then he said:

"You aren't going to get a chance to warn him, so I'll tell you. He's a guide by the name of John Corbeau. He lives here."

The man stared at William and frowned, as if puzzled by this.

"You want for shoot Johnny Corbeau?" he said.

William nodded.

"He's a little man with a big nose and two teeth missing."

The man grinned as if understanding had dawned on him.

"Oh," he said. "You want for shoot Johnny Corbeau. I did not hear good at first. I am afraid we will wait long for him here."

"Is he out of town?"

The man shook his head.

"He is here, someplace. But it will be a long time before he come to this house."

"I'm going to stay here if he doesn't come till midnight. And you, too."

The man sighed.

"We should sit down then," he said,

and sprawled on the ground with his back against an orange tree, tossing down the ducks beside him.

After a moment William sat on the step, holding the gun steadily on the figure before him.

"I am called Villard," the man said after awhile. "I have not seen you here before; but you know Johnny Corbeau?"

William told his name, adding that he came from St. Louis.

"I've never seen Corbeau," he said. "But I know enough. Shooting's too good for him. He ought to be hanged."

Villard propped his chin in his hand and stared thoughtfully at William.

"That is right," he said.

William opened his eyes very wide, and unconsciously lowered the gun.

"What?"

Villard nodded.

"All peoples around here know Johnny Corbeau is bad and somebody ought to shoot him a long time ago. But nobody has hate him bad enough to do so and be hung, maybe."

"They can hang me," William said. "I'll give myself up as soon as I've killed him. I don't care what happens once I give this murderer what he deserves. The law won't touch him, so I'll have to do it myself."

"Johnny Corbeau has murder somebody?"

William nodded, clamping his mouth together hard. Villard nodded slowly.

"That is easy to believe," he said. "He is one bad, that Johnny. Sometime I have wished for shoot him myself."

They were silent for awhile. The sun had grown stronger and warmed William a little. Scraps of light shuttled back and forth over the ground as the wind shook the orange trees. Some young chickens hopped out of the coop and began to peck about the yard. Villard stirred and sat up straight against the tree.

"This is not good sense, *cher*," he said. "Johnny Corbeau will be gone all day, I think. We should wait for him in the barroom. I am dry, me, like one shrimp those Chinaman send to China. You are need a drink, too."

The mention of alcohol always made William stiff. Even his voice sounded stiff when he perversely objected—

"I don't drink."

Villard stared at him.

"That is too bad," he said in the same tone a man might use in pitying some one who had lost an arm. "But we should go to the bar, us. Johnny Corbeau will come there today, and you can shoot him better than here."

William thought that Villard looked more honest than any one he had seen here except Old Man Giles. He was friendly, in spite of the fact that William had nearly shot him, and he seemed genuinely pleased that Johnny Corbeau was going to die. But William was not taking any chances of being tricked into a position where his gun could be taken from him. He stood up.

"All right," he said. "We'll go to the saloon. But remember, my gun's right here in my pocket. One false move, and I'll shoot you."

Villard gravely said that he would take no liberties with William and his gun. As they came up on to the levee, he stopped a twelve-year-old girl and handed her the ducks, saying that she could have two if she would clean them.

"She is a good child, that Mimi," he said as they went on. "Her house is next door to my house. I will eat those duck for my supper."

IT'S a fact that William had never been in a barroom, speakeasy or any place where liquor is sold. He thought they were either dirty holes full of rat-eyed gangsters and drunks rolling on the floor, or glittering palaces with mirrors, vice and seductions. This place was clean and rather bare. The walls were whitewashed and had no pictures of naked ladies. Three or four men were shooting poker dice over the bar, laughing some, but not making much noise. Two more sat by a stove in a corner. They all nodded at William and spoke to Villard, grinning.

Villard led the way to a small table and gave William a chair with his back to the wall.

"From here," he said, "you can see who comes in the door. When Johnny Corbeau is come—one shot. He is blowed up."

William kept his overcoat on and his hand on the gun in his pocket. The bartender came limping across the floor. One leg was shorter than the other. He had very bright, straight-looking blue eyes.

"This is William," Villard said. "He is my friend, him. But he must shake with his left hand. He has mash his right fixing his car."

The lame man gripped William's left in a clutch that hurt.

"My name's Snyder," he said. "Glad to meet you. Too bad about your hand. What are you drinking?"

Before William could open his mouth to proclaim that liquor had never passed his lips, Villard said:

"You will bring my friend some of that good orange juice from upstairs. He need something for fix him up. I will have one bottle wine, me. I am dry like some dry shrimp."

He sat back and grinned at Snyder. The barkeeper looked at him a minute and glanced down at William.

"Just as you say, Johnny," he said, and limped away.

William looked at his new acquaintance with respect and growing gratitude. For a moment the situation had been completely out of his control. It would have been awkward not to shake hands, but he had to keep hold of his gun. Corbeau might be here at any moment. Also, it would have looked suspicious if he refused to drink in a saloon. Villard had avoided any awkwardness by his ready lie about the smashed hand, and by ordering orange juice. He started to thank him, but the Cajun was already talking.

"We make an orange juice down here that is most good for the stomach. These doctor say the juice of one orange is good. What do they know, them? What we do is make juice from three orange—one sweet, one a little sour, one wild orange—and that is more sour than vinegar, and does good to the inside. Me, I have been all day in the swamp to shoot duck. I need wine. But this will make you feel good."

Snyder brought the bottles; one all cobwebby and covered with earth mold for Villard, and a clean, fresh one for William.

"I am tell my friend," Villard said, "how this juice of orange is good for the stomach."

"Sure," Snyder said. "I always keep some on hand for people that don't feel good. Make a new man of you, young fellow."

Villard paid, over William's protest, saying that he was a friend and a guest and his money no good. William poured out a full glass. The orange juice was lighter colored than that he drank at home with his dry toast in the morning. The flavor was odd, too. Not sweet, but once it passed the tip of the tongue, not sour either; it was like an orange, but not like an orange, and strangely warm. Villard watched William take his first sip.

"It is that wild orange," he said. "You have not taste that before. The more you will drink, the more good it will seem, yes."

He took his own glass and drained half the wine at one swallow. William turned suddenly toward the entrance. Heavy feet were clumping up the incline to the bar. He snapped the safety of his automatic and glued his eyes to the door. Three men came in, and one was short and hatchet faced. William's arms tensed.

"No!" Villard said. "That is not him, *cher*. Wait till he get into the light. You will see."

The man turned toward them and spoke to Villard. He had wide-set, twinkling black eyes and showed a full set of teeth. Villard laughed.

"That is Steve Salinovitch, engineer for the pump station. You will shoot the wrong man yet."

William sat back, feeling hollow in the stomach. He had to kill Johnny Corbeau, and that was bad enough without shooting anybody else. As a man will when he feels nervous or upset, William took a long pull at his glass. He sat with his eyes on the door and kept on sipping. Pretty soon the glass was empty.

Villard filled it again.

"Where will you shoot this man?" he asked. "I have never shot a man, me, but I have often wonder what would be the best place, in the heart or in the head. Sometime I think I will shoot

for the stomach."

William had begun to feel a little warm. He unbuttoned his coat before he answered.

"I plan to shoot for the heart. If I shoot three times, one bullet's certain to kill instantly. I might miss his head, and he wouldn't die right away, anyhow."

Villard nodded gravely.

"That is right. He is one dangerous, this Johnny. You should not give him a chance to shoot back."

"I don't care whether he shoots me or not," William said. "Only I've got to make sure he dies. That's all I care about."

"You hate him most bad," Villard said, pouring wine for himself. "What he has do to you must be great wrong, I think, to make you feel so hard."

WILLIAM took half a glass of orange juice at one gulp, and his face drew up into a knot. He sat staring at the door for a long time, not saying anything. Almost without his knowing it, his hand reached out and filled the glass again.

He felt quite warm now. Before, he had been at a high pitch, worked up to the point of doing the deed he had planned for so long. He had grown very calm. He was going to kill Johnny Corbeau, the skunk! But he no longer felt nervous about it. He would simply sit there and shoot him as he came through the door.

All of a sudden, and to his own surprise, William found himself talking. He had hardly spoken to any one since last Fall when he decided that Johnny Corbeau needed killing. His determination had been born of silent brooding. To kill was a terrible thing to William, though he thought it his duty. He had kept his plan secret. Now the words poured out of him, he hardly knew how.

"There's no way for the law to touch him," William said. "The body's never been found, and he destroyed all evidence. It's just one of those times when an honorable man has to take the law into his own hands."

William stopped to let some of the good orange juice run over his tongue. That glowing feeling in his stomach must be its tonic effect taking hold.

"It was my sister's fiancé," he said. "Ted Rand. Poor old Ted! Maybe you met him when he came down here?"

"But yes," Villard said. "A tall young boy with white mustache. Younger than you."

"He's older," William said, "but I look old for my age. Ted Rand was engaged to my sister. Last spring he came down to New Orleans to—"

Villard broke in on him, then.

"You think Johnny Corbeau have murder this boy? But he was drown in the Gulf, him!"

"That's what Corbeau said!" William clenched his left hand, found he wanted to drink with it, and drew his right from his pocket, leaving the gun. "That's what he wrote Ted's folks in St. Louis. But it's not so. Ted didn't drown himself. I know he didn't."

Villard leaned closer, looking seriously at William.

"That Johnny Corbeau is bad, all right. You think he has murder your friend and throw him to the shark?"

William nodded. He had meant to put his hand back in his pocket, but his glass was in his hand, and wine in the glass, so he didn't.

"He fooled Ted's family," William said, twisting his set mouth to let the words come out. "They swallowed his lies. But not me. The more I thought about it, the less his story hung together. Corbeau wrote that Ted got washed overboard in a storm. Well, I looked up the weather reports for the time he disappeared, and there wasn't any storm for ten days."

He looked at Villard as much as to say, "and what do you think of that?"

Villard looked back at William solemnly.

"You are tell me a fact? Johnny wrote about a storm that was never blow?"

William nodded.

"And that's not all," he said. "Corbeau sent back Ted's billfold and a few letters. Said that Ted had left them aboard the boat. Corbeau thought he was smart. He left twenty-five dollars to make it look as if he was honest. I happen to know that Ted drew all his

money out of the bank before he left New Orleans. There was over five hundred in that billfold."

"You are pretty smart yourself, you," Villard said. "It is too bad we have allow that Johnny to live so long."

"Corbeau made a mistake about Ted's clothes, too," William went on. "I don't know why, but Ted left his apartment bare. Put his trunk in storage and took his suitcases. Corbeau sent back his overcoat and a few other things, but Ted must have left a lot more.

"All these things add up till they make it look mighty bad." William paused long enough to fill his glass from a new bottle which had come to the table while he was deep in his story. "Other people didn't think anything of them. Ted's father even wrote and thanked Corbeau. But my sister has a broken heart, Mr. Villard. A broken heart. I'm going to punish the man who murdered Ted if it's the last act of my life. I've thought about it from every angle. I know Corbeau is guilty. It's my duty to do what the law won't do.

"I'm ready for him, too. All Winter I practised pistol shooting in the basement, and I won't miss."

"You came very near to shoot me," Villard said. "I think you will kill Johnny, here where the light is good. That will be good, yes. You do right to hunt the man who has cause your sister to suffer. I drink you success."

William, by now, was feeling very warm indeed. He mopped his forehead and loosened his semi-stiff collar, which was badly wilted. Then he sat back to sip his drink.

"This is good stuff," he said. "I think I'll take some back with me for a tonic —only I'm not going to go back, I guess. I think I'd like another bottle now."

"Sure," Villard said. "It will do a man good, yes. Bill! Another bottle for me and one for my good friend here."

William insisted on paying for these. He found that he wanted very much to do something for this friendly Delta man. The glow in his stomach mounted to his head and spread through his whole body. When he reached into his pocket to make sure his gun was there, his hand felt sweaty on the metal. He wiped off his palms, and by then the new bottles had come.

They drank. William felt better still.

"You know," he said, "you're a great fellow, Villard. It isn't everybody that would have done what you've done for me today. I pretty nearly shot you. But you didn't get mad. No, sir! You turned right around and did everything you could to help me. That's what I call decent. Mighty decent!"

"When you shoot at me, I am surprise," Villard said. "I have shoot those duck and land my pirogue in the bayou back of Johnny's house. I think to speak with you and say that Johnny is in the barroom, maybe. Then you shoot, and for a minute I am mad.

"Then I look at your face and right away know you are all right. That is the way with me. I look at a man once, and if he look good to me, that is enough. He is my friend, him!"

"That's it, friends!" William said. "A man doesn't have enough friends in this world. Know that? Not friends like you, who'll stand by him and understand what he's doing and help him. Will you shake hands again?"

THEY shook once more, and Villard filled up the glasses. By ones and twos the other men in the bar had gone. Outside, evening was coming on. The barkeeper pumped up a gasoline lantern and hobbled out to hang it in the center of the room. William sat quietly, thinking about the beauty of friendship. When he suddenly remembered that he had to shoot Johnny Corbeau, he came out of his day-dream like a man jerked from sleep.

"Corbeau ought to be here by now," he said. "You told me he always came in to get a drink before dinner."

"That is right," Villard said. He turned in his chair so that he faced William squarely. For a moment he sat so, looking at him. "*Cher,*" he said, "there is a thing I have to tell you, now. I am Johnny Corbeau."

William's eyes opened wide, and his mouth hung slack.

"You can't be," he said. "The man I talked to in New Orleans said he was a little, rat-faced man. You're Villard."

"Half the men in this place are call

Corbeau. There are eight Johnny Corbeau. I am call Johnny Villard-Corbeau. That other Johnny is in jail one year, now. I am the man who wrote those letter about Ted Rand."

William could move fast enough when he wanted to. His hand went into his pocket and came out holding the gun while Villard was saying his last three words.

"Don't move," he said. "I'll give you a minute to say your prayers before I shoot you."

Villard sat hardly two feet from William, looking him in the eyes. His own eyes were very full and dark and impressive.

"Think," he said. "Look at me, man! Am I one to push your friend in the Gulf for five hundred dollar?"

William's hand was clenched white on the gun. His finger had taken up the trigger slack. A little pull more, and he would send this Cajun on a one way trip to the next world. That's what he had come for—to settle for the killing of Ted Rand. He had made up his mind that it was his duty to kill, and when young William decided on his duty he had no choice. And yet, only a moment ago he had called this man friend. They had had a good time together. He had liked Villard. For a moment William couldn't do anything.

"Have sense," Villard said. "If I had done what you think, would I tell who I am? Do I look that much fool?"

"Talk," William said hoarsely, still leveling his pistol. "If you've got anything to say for yourself, tell me quick!"

Johnny Villard-Corbeau moved back a little from the pistol point. He said:

"Those letter were big lie, all right. But not like you think. This Ted Rand is not drown. He has gone to sea in a big ship. I will tell how this has happen.

"Sometime when the shrimp are not in season and I can't trap, I am guide. In Wintertime I take people for hunt, and other times for fish.

"One day I am on my boat doing some little thing when the mail boat blow for the landing. I pay no attention, me, and pretty soon the mail boat is go. But a step comes on the wharf, and I look out. I see a young man with a little white mustache and blue eyes and a white suit on. He have in his hand one big suitcase, and it pretty near bend him double to carry it.

"He ask if I am Johnny Villard. I say I am, what I can do for him? He say he wants to go fish in Gulf, so I make a price to him and he hand me his suitcase and come aboard.

" 'Well,' he is say, 'let's go!'

"That is much hurry for a man to be in, to go off to the Gulf without food or fish lines or anything but the little I already have aboard. I think to myself there is something funny about this fellow.

"I go fast to get grub and whatever we need, but that is not fast enough. Ted Rand all the time walk up and down and fidget with his hands and smoke one cigaret on top another. When I finally have cast off and we are in the river he sit down like he is limp, and put his head in his hands awhile.

"I am at the wheel when he come up with a bottle. He has drink some and hand me the bottle. I like to drink, me, but this I spit out on deck. Bad gin from New Orleans, the kind to rot your stomach and burn your throat. I tell him where to go and send him to get two bottle of this same tonic you have been drink. I can see he has drink too much gin. He is too white for a man to be.

"The tonic make him feel some better, but not much. He still is nervous and look most sad. All the way down he look sad, and that night when we anchor in a bayou I can hear him toss and toss on the bunk.

"Now already I know this Ted Rand is no fisherman. He has got no clothes for fish, nor a pole nor anything. In the morning he is sound asleep, so I am go early to catch some fish for breakfast.

"I come back quiet, poling the skiff. He is not on deck, so I come aboard in my bare feet and go to the bunk. He is sit on the edge of the bunk with my gun point at his head.

"He don't see me. I reach in through the door and grab those gun quick. The bullet go through the roof. There is a hole there right now. He is mad, this Ted, because I have stop him from kill himself. But when he has finish

his breakfast he thank me. Then he tell why he is feel so bad.

"In New Orleans are many men who are no good. This Ted has been friends with some like that, and he have not much sense. One bootlegger has got a trunk full of liquor, and when he ask Ted if he can put it in Ted's room, Ted tell him he can.

"Now this bootlegger has had partner, and the two have made a big fight and split up. The partner comes to Ted and says the liquor belong to him. He says for Ted to give to him. Ted say he will not, and the bootlegger threaten him. If Ted will not give the liquor, he will go to revenue officers and have him arrest.

"Ted can not find the man to whom the liquor belong to tell him to take his trunk away. He is much scared. If he give the liquor to that partner, the other man will maybe shoot him. If he does not give it, the revenue officer will come; and that scare Ted worse still.

"He is engaged to some girl up North. If he is get in trouble over liquor and his name appear in the paper, she will not marry to him. Maybe she herself will forgive. But her brother and her mother are stiff like some pokers. They will be most mad, and never let him see her again.

"So Ted run away and come down into the bayous with me. He does not know what has happen; whether the partner has stole the liquor or tell the revenue men. He is despair, so he try to shoot himself.

"I look at this Ted and I know what kind of a heart he have. He is not yet a man. All his life he has had a most easy time. His backbone is yet a little bit weak, and he know nothing about the world, so everything look most big and strange. He does not know good people from those bad.

"I tell him what I will do. If he want to die, he can die for one year or a little more, and come back to life after. Down near the pass where the Mississippi come into the sea all ships must take on the bar pilot. A captain who is friend to me since we are boys will be there soon. Ted can go on this ship and when he come back he will tell his girl how he was rescue by the ship in a storm.

"Ted is think this plan very good. He has a heart most romantic, and he think how fine to come back from the dead and be hero to all. Me, I think how he will work hard on that ship and come back a man, maybe.

"So," Villard said, sitting back with a grin, "that is how it was. Ted went on the boat, and I wrote those letter, me. When I am see you by my house, right away I know who you are. You are that stiff brother to Ted's girl, come to find out how he has died."

WILLIAM sat looking at Villard for a long time. He looked down at the gun, still leveled at the man's breast, then back at his face again. It was an open face, burned nearly black from exposure, lined and wrinkled now with humor.

"If you're telling the truth," he said, "I've been a fool. But how do I know you're not lying? You fooled me once today. The letters you wrote were lies. Prove to me Ted's alive or I'll have to do what I came down here for."

He made a motion with the gun so there wouldn't be any doubt about what he meant. Villard was still grinning.

"Come on to my house," he said. "It is time for eat supper, anyhow. Mimi should have clean those duck."

When William got up, he swayed a little on his feet. When he walked across the room he went more stiffly than usual, setting one foot carefully in front of the other. Bill Snyder grinned at Villard and Villard winked. But William noticed nothing of this. His mind was churning with thoughts which did not mix well—hope that Ted was alive, suspicion of Villard, and a sickish feeling that he had made an ass of himself.

They walked through half-darkness toward the Cajun's house. William kept his gun pointed at Villard through his coat pocket, but this was difficult. He stumbled three or four times, and when they came down off the levee, Villard actually had to help him.

He lighted two lamps in the kitchen.

William followed when he carried one into the other room and stood guarding him while he rummaged in a trunk. William was cold now. The night air had an edge and the suspense of hope and fear helped to chill him. He had really liked Ted, and he worshiped his sister.

Villard handed him two letters and led the way back to the kitchen. William put the gun on the table and sat down. Villard began to stuff fine kindling into a wood stove. William opened the first letter.

It was from Bordeaux. It said that the writer found the wine very good but could not stand absinth; that he was beginning to toughen up and the work wasn't so bad now. It was signed "Ted". The second was from Stockholm and said he hoped to be an A. B. before he left that ship. He was having a fine time and thought the way he had run out of New Orleans was a good joke. There was no doubt about the writing or wording. They were Ted's, and no one else's.

William laid the letters down, took the automatic by the barrel and threw it out the open door.

"What a fool!" he said. "What a—" he hiccoughed—"fine idiot I am. I might have shot you!"

Villard turned from the stove, grinning.

"*Cher,*" he said, "you are a good boy. But you take life most hard and you don't laugh enough. When I am see you here today, I could tell. You had think so long about how you would kill me, you would not listen. That is why I made you half drunk, so you would come to your right mind and hear what is the truth."

William leaned forward, staring.

"You mean," he said, "you mean I'm not sober? The orange tonic was—was wine?"

Villard laughed.

"Don't look like some snake have bite you. That orange wine is tonic, all right. Look. Before, when you were sober, you would have shot me. After you had drink, you felt good, yes. A man must laugh to see how life is. And wine will make a man laugh. If you had laugh some before, this trouble about Ted would never have happen."

William shook his head, puzzled.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"Ted is something of fool, but mostly because he is young. The trouble he got in was not bad trouble. But he think it was bad because he is afraid of you. What would you have do if he had got his name in the paper for liquor in his place? Would you let him marry to your sister then?"

"That's right," William said slowly. "I guess I'd never have spoken to Ted again."

Villard nodded.

"So," he said, "because you never have taste wine, you think all who drink are bad. You don't understand how a man can get in some little trouble and still be all right, and maybe learn some sense. I have live fifty-one year, me. Always I have drink wine and always I am able to laugh. To get drunk brings a man to trouble, but there is trouble in a long face and a dry throat that is most bad.

"Here is Mimi come with those duck. You are a good child, Mimi."

CAMPBELL sat a moment smiling at the fire, then got up and crossed the room to a cupboard. He came back with two bottles, somewhat dusty and without labels. He began driving in a corkscrew.

"Yes," I said. "And what about Ted Rand? Did he come back and marry William's sister?"

"Why, yes," Campbell said, "he did. And the funny part of it is that Ted hardly drinks at all any more. He's one of the model citizens of St. Louis.

"But William—" Campbell held a glass of pale golden liquid to the light and smiled at it—"William moved to New Orleans and began using his middle name so nobody could call him William any more. I wouldn't say that he was a drunkard, but—"

Campbell handed me my glass.

"As I said, I'm an unmoral man, and my notions will never get me elected to Congress. But I don't think I'll ever try to shoot a man again, duty or no duty. Villard made this orange tonic. Drink up! It's good for the stomach."

# Low Jump

*By* LLOYD S. GRAHAM

IN PARACHUTING it is the low jump that terrifies, not the high one. The higher you are, the safer. Most aviators know that. At least those who have been trained in the Army and Navy parachute schools. In this particular branch of aerial education, no one is required to make a practise jump, though one may do so if he wishes. Even without the practise jumps, pilots trained in the fine aviation traditions of these two Services know that the theoretical danger line in the use of the parachute is about 300 feet above the earth.

While this is true in theory, it is also true that several men have been saved with their parachutes at much less than 300 feet—one or two as low as 100 feet. And 100 feet in the air is a mere nothing. Curiously enough, in the early days of the life saving parachute, that is, around 1924, when even Army men did not know much about them and said they were useless at low altitudes, the fifth Army Caterpillar saved himself with a jump from about 150 feet. This was Lieutenant Walter Lees of the Reserve Corps; and he took to silk on June 13, 1924, near Dayton, Ohio, when the controls of an old German plane jammed and made it impossible for him to make a safe landing, or do anything else that a sane pilot would want to do.

But the prize for an emergency low jump should probably go to Major Adlai H. Gilkeson for a thrill which he received on October 5, 1927, while testing a P-1 plane near Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. Any one will recall the start he received the first time a toy balloon burst in his hands. Multiply that by about ten thousand, and you get some idea of Major Gilkeson's experience.

He was trying to determine the glide necessary in the P-1 to attain a speed of two hundred miles an hour. About 50 feet from the ground there was a crash and jolt which flung the plane about forty-five degrees to the right. A cloud of gas, oil and water enveloped the ship, which shot 150 feet into the air, rolled to the right and started down. Major Gilkeson slid out of the cockpit at 100 feet. The plane rolled completely over and landed upside down. It is supposed that the propeller or crankshaft broke. Anyhow, the motor practically went to pieces in the air. The pilot had to work fast. The jerk of the chute opening was almost instantly followed by impact with the ground—too close for comfort. Yet Major Gilkeson was not injured in any way.

Interesting as these and other low emergency jumps are, it is one thing to make them as a last resort in an emergency, when a second of time may be the difference between life and death, and quite another to make such a jump deliberately as did Floyd Smith when he showed the Navy what a low jump really was in a demonstration at Anacostia on the morning of November 21, 1919.

The Navy had not yet adopted parachutes. Several high officials had watched demonstrations by other jumpers a few days earlier, but many of them naturally doubted their effectiveness at low altitudes. It just happened that Floyd Smith had been advocating training in parachute jumping by lift-offs from the wing of a plane. That is, the jumper would stand on the wing of the plane and, when it reached the proper height, he would merely need to pull the ripcord and be lifted off.

Floyd thought he would do a low

lift-off himself so that the Navy could see just how low the parachute would work. He proposed to be pulled off at about 100 feet over water. No one had ever heard of anything so crazy before. Most deliberately planned jumps were made from 1,000 to 1,500 feet, and still are.

An HS2L seaplane was used for the purpose, and a Navy pilot was at the controls. There was plenty of gold braid around the Anacostia reservation that day. The pilot of the HS2L climbed to 1,200 feet. Smith crawled well out on a wing and grasped a strut. The plane was put into a glide of forty-five degrees, and it was planned that the pilot would level off at a 100 or 150 feet above the water, whereupon Smith would pull the ripcord and do his stuff. Up to the time it went into the dive, or glide, the plane had performed beautifully, remaining on an even keel despite the weight of Floyd Smith, who was no lightweight, far out on one wing.

But when the HS2L went into the glide it did not perform so well. Smith, who had been flying planes since 1912, sensed that something was wrong. The plane was in a lop-sided sort of glide with his end of the wings in advance of the opposite end. He saw that the pilot was doing his utmost to straighten the plane up and bring it into a respectable glide. Well, Smith thought, it will straighten out well enough when he levels off for me to jump.

The HS2L got down to 200 and then 100 feet, but did not level off. Smith saw that the pilot was frantic in his efforts to bring the plane out of the glide and into level flight. Then Smith knew, in the split-second that a seasoned airman senses those things, that the ship could not be pulled out of the glide with him on the wing. If he waited until the ship came to an even keel before he pulled his ripcord and was lifted off, they would simply glide to the Great Beyond and end in a mass of water soaked wreckage.

With the water perilously close, and Smith perched precariously on the edge of the wing still at the gliding angle, he did the only thing he could do to complete his demonstration, save the ship, the pilot and himself. He held himself as straight as possible from the strut and pulled his ripcord. In a breath he was snatched from the wing, made a quarter-turn of the arc, like the weight on the end of a pendulum, and struck the water.

For the officers and other watchers on shore that was a thrill they are still talking about. They noticed that the plane was not gliding correctly. They noted that it did not level off at the prescribed distance above the water. They knew something was wrong. And then, at a height so low that it seemed suicidal, they saw the parachute burst forth, saw Smith jerked from the wing and strike the water in the first swing from the inflated canopy.

A motorboat, cruising about for the purpose of picking up the jumper, instantly darted in and was at his side almost at once. Observers expected to see a badly injured man brought ashore. Instead, they saw a very wet and bedraggled, but very healthy and satisfied, man get out of the rescuing motorboat. They knew better than he how low his jump had been. He thought it was from about 100 feet. Officers agreed that it could not have been more than 70 feet above the water that he was snatched from the wing. When one considers that it is fully 45 feet from the peak of a chute to the body of the wearer, it is easy to understand the fear of the watchers for Smith. It is easy to see how it was that he hit the water in the first swing. So far as I know, this is the record low jump of all time.

The pilot of the HS2L? Oh, yes. Cleverly, he averted a crash and possible injury or death to himself—by pulling the plane into level flight the instant Smith left the wing. The plane responded well enough when it was relieved of the jumper's weight. He made a normal landing. All in the day's work.

# MAN UNDERGROUND

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

BRICK BALLARD, accountant at the Cobrillo copper mine, was disgruntled. He tugged petulantly at a necktie which was as red as his hair and muttered—

"If I knew where I could get me another job I'd quit this dump cold."

The dump was nothing less than the biggest complete copper plant on earth, Cobrillo of the Atacama Desert in North Chile. It employed three thousand native miners and a staff of a hundred gringos. It dug low grade ore at the rate of ten thousand tons per shift, crushed it, leached it, transformed it by the magic of electrolysis into weekly shiploads of pure copper plates. Of the hundred gringo staffmen, most were engineers, drillers and chemists; a few were office men under cantankerous Chief Accountant Murdock; of the latter one was Brick Ballard—and Ballard was sour on his job.

Murdock had been nagging Ballard for weeks. Today he had rebuked Ballard because the books failed to balance, and had made Ballard work alone and late here at the Administración. At something after ten at night Ballard found the error, which had been made by Murdock himself.

"The big stiff!" he raged. "If there was another billet in sight I'd quit him cold."

He put the books in the vault, turned out the lights, locked the office and strode away through the dark streets of the plant. The tired day shifts had long since gone to bed. The night crews were at work, as evidenced by the roar of the gyratory crushers, by the grinding of steam shovels high on the hill and by the whining brakes of ore trains coasting down from the benches.

The staff mess-house was dark, and Ballard, who had gone supperless, decided to walk over the hill to Placillo. Placillo was a native village which had sprung up on the far fringe of the concession. It consisted mainly of dives, but there was one decent restaurant.

By a zigzag path Ballard ascended the

long, low mountain which separates Cobrillo from Placillo. When he reached the summit he could see the lights of thirty small drill rigs. He could hear them chugging. These machines were not drilling for either oil or water; they were simply proving the farther and as yet unexploited reaches of the mountain. They were spaced exactly at hundred meter intervals in all directions, at the surveyed corners of a huge checkerboard. Their object was to determine the percentage of copper content in each hectare of area. If a block were as good as two per cent, it was worth mining; if not, it wasn't.

Cobrillo, financed by huge Yankee fortunes, does not guess. Before taking a mountain to the mill, it first takes the mill to the mountain.

Ballard descended the far slope to Placillo and sought the restaurant. After eating, he emerged into a street strewn with broken bottles and tin cans. Cantinas were in full swing, but Ballard was not enticed. He was not a spender. On the contrary he was a sober saver; half of his pay for the past year was, for the lack of a public bank, now safely stored in the vault at the Cobrillo Administración.

He was turning back up the hill when, glancing to the north, he noticed a light well up the desert and beyond the farthest drill rig. It was a trifle northeast of the Cobrillo concession. Ballard knew that it shone from a small private mine called the Perro Verde, owned by an Englishman named John Claycomb.

"I wonder," mused Ballard, "if Claycomb could use an office man."

Ballard knew Claycomb, for Claycomb had often come over to play poker with staffmen at Cobrillo. He considered Claycomb a regular fellow. Certainly he would be an improvement, as a boss, over the fault-finding Murdock. Claycomb, though a Britisher, had been in Chile thirty years and was known everywhere as Don Juan. The title had been bestowed long before Yankee millions had arrived to raze, with steam shovels, this two per cent mountain.

Before that, even since the era of the Inca, the area had been mined for copper. Stone hammers had tapped centuries ago where machine drills tapped now. The cream of the ore had long been skimmed, a fact attested by numerous shafts, ancient tunnels and veritable catacombs deep in the pampa. All the old workings had long since been abandoned, except the one still operated by Don Juan Claycomb.

On an impulse, Brick Ballard turned his steps toward the Claycomb light.

IT WAS near midnight when he arrived. The main building was a sprawling, massive-walled adobe. Ballard knocked at its door and was admitted by Claycomb's *mozo,* a scarred and flat nosed Bolivian named Arturo. Arturo ushered Ballard into a room richly elegant, floored with rugs which would have done credit to an Oriental prince.

In fact, John Claycomb had been dubbed more than once by natives, "prince of the pampa." He was one of those not uncommon Englishmen who are content to live a lifetime in some squalid corner of the earth and maintain there a sort of grand dukish splendor. Claycomb was vain; he liked to look down his nose at the world; he basked in the adulation of peons. However, he had always been hail-fellow-well-met with the staff at Cobrillo.

Ballard found him seated at a table drinking excellent wine. He wore a dinner coat, since he had just returned from a party given by the general manager's wife at Cobrillo.

"What ho, Ballard, old chap?" he greeted, and sent Arturo down to the cellar for more wine.

Over the wine Ballard told his troubles.

"Murdock's been ragging me, and I'm fed up. If I knew where I could grab another job I'd quit. What about getting on here?"

A shrewd look came into the black

eyes of John Claycomb. He stroked his Van Dyke beard, then drummed with well manicured fingers on the table. He drew out a full story of discontent from Brick Ballard.

Ballard talked. Claycomb asked questions and listened. Claycomb was canny. He already knew a great many things about the Cobrillo staffmen. He had absorbed gossip at the poker tables over there; he knew which of the big mine's crew were spenders and which were savers. He knew that Ballard was one of the savers. It was not hard for him to guess that Ballard's savings were in an envelop marked "Charles Ballard, Personal," and that the envelop was in the safe of the Administración vault. Cobrillo staffmen habitually kept their savings either in pocket or in the company vault.

"Sorry, old chap," said Claycomb, "but I've no opening here."

Had he been entirely frank he would have added:

"I'm broke. Only yesterday I shut down the Perro Verde. I have no employee other than this scarfaced *mozo*. I still owe for this dinner coat and my automobile. My mine and furnishings are mortgaged. My miners think the shutdown is only for a week or so, and they hope to come back. But I told them that merely to buck up my credit. When you came in I was on the point of driving down to the nitrate pampa and touching a countryman there for a loan."

But Claycomb did not see fit to make any such admission. Instead he poured his guest another cup of wine and drawled:

"Dash it, don't blame you for quitting Murdock. Always crabbing, that blighter is! Why don't you sign on with Loma Negra Nitrate, Limited? I happen to know they need a paymaster. Dashed good pay, too."

Ballard was all ears.

"You think I'd fill the bill?" he asked.

"Why not? You're intelligent, honest; you speak Spanish and are experienced with Chileno payrolls. You'd fit like plaster. Trouble is the job won't go begging long. If you could apply bright and early in the morning, I dare say you'd land it. Manager's an old Eton classmate o' mine; I'd give you a recommend."

"But I can't apply bright and early in the morning," protested Ballard with a grimace. "It's a hundred miles to the nitrate pampa, and I've no transportation."

"Happens I'm driving down that way myself tonight," said Claycomb, carefully fitting a cigaret into an ivory holder. He puffed it, adding, "Cooler driving at night, you know. Hop in with me if you like, old fellow. You see, tomorrow's Saturday, payday; so they need this paymaster right away. If you don't apply in the morning, it's a bet they'll grab some one else."

Ballard wanted the job avidly.

"But hang it," he protested, "I can hardly wake Murdock at this hour of the night and resign!"

"Why not leave a note on his desk?" suggested Claycomb carelessly. "Of course, if you'd rather not offend him—"

"Why the devil should I worry about offending him?" exploded Ballard. "Didn't he bawl me out today—for his own mistake? I threatened to quit. He told me the quicker I quit the better he'd like it. Darn it, I'm going to grab this nitrate job while the grabbing's good. Sure I can leave a note on his desk. I can pack a suitcase, get my own money out of the safe and be ready to go with you in a couple of hours."

"Right!" purred Don Juan Claycomb. "Pop over there, then, and pack your stuff. If you're at the road fork just below camp in a couple of hours, I'll pick you up."

Ballard thanked him. He departed, hastening over the hill to Cobrillo. En route, he passed near many drill rigs and steam shovel crews. But he did not stop. Goodbys would consume time which he could not afford to lose.

THE night was dark. The street of staff cabins was shadowless and deserted when Ballard reached it. He entered his own cabin and hastily packed a suitcase.

With this he strode down to the south end of the building layout, where loomed the broad hulk of the Administración. He met no one. He saw no one until he came to the office steps, on which squatted a Chileno named Guillermo. Guillermo was the trusted and trustworthy nightwatchman always posted in front of the Administración. He grunted a greeting. Ballard strode past him, unlocked the office door and entered the building.

That Ballard should enter the office at this hour did not alarm the nightwatchman. Accountant Ballard had often worked at night. In fact, the nightwatchman knew that Ballard had worked here until ten o'clock this very night. Since tomorrow was payday, the watchman assumed that Ballard still had work to do in connection with the plant's vast roll of labor.

Thus Guillermo gave only sleepy attention to Ballard's entrance.

Ballard, having entered, did not relock the door. He was coming right out again, anyway, and he knew that an armed watchman was guarding the steps. After turning on a light, he went to Chief Accountant Murdock's desk and wrote a note:

> Murdock:
>
> If you'll look on page 98 of Book N you'll find the bull you bawled me out for; you'll note that the erroneous entry is in your own writing. The same thing's happened forty times, so I owe you no apology for quitting. Have a chance for a berth at Loma Negra Nitrate, Ltd, and will lose out if I don't go immediately. John Claycomb is giving me a lift down. Am taking my own envelop out of the vault.
>
> —CHARLES BALLARD

Ballard put the note under a paperweight on Murdock's desk.

He went to the vault. It being his duty to lock up the books every evening, he was familiar with the combination. He turned the knob to the left, to the right, to the left, to the right, gave it a whirl, a pull, another whirl—and the heavy steel door swung open.

Inside was a safe. Again Ballard gave a nickel knob the proper sequence of turns. Again a steel door swung open.

Nothing in that safe interested Ballard except a certain personal envelop. There was a rack of such envelops, and on each was written the name of some sober staffman who had, like Ballard, saved part of his pay each month. Ballard selected the envelop which bore his own name. It contained six thousand pesos in Chilian currency.

Farther back in the safe were bales of like currency, mostly in small denominations. They totaled one hundred and eighty thousand pesos and were the week's pay, due tomorrow, made ready for three thousand native laborers who earned an average of sixty pesos weekly. This afternoon Ballard had helped Murdock sort that money and stow it in the safe. Ballard gave it no thought now. That which was his own he took, and nothing more.

While Ballard was in the office, two men stood in the inky darkness back of the Administración. One, now wearing a poncho, was the flat nosed and scarred *mozo* from the Perro Verde. The other was his master, Don Juan Claycomb. The latter had replaced his dinner coat with a black jacket, buttoned tightly, so that his white dress shirt would not gleam in the night.

With Arturo in the lead, the two crept around the building. They made no sound. A sound, in fact, would not have been readily heard; for Cobrillo is always noisy, night or day. The crushers, the shovels and the ore trains never cease roaring.

The two slid along the west wall to a front corner of the building. Arturo peered around that corner. Close by he saw Nightwatchman Guillermo seated sleepily on the office steps. Claycomb likewise peered around the corner and

saw Guillermo. Arturo drew two feet of lead pipe out from under his poncho.

"Not yet!" whispered Claycomb.

Not yet! For John Claycomb was an opportunist. He needed money. He needed bales of money. A few thousand pesos, which could easily be stolen from Ballard later on, would not do him at all. But if by using Ballard as a key Claycomb could annex the entire content of the vault—that would be a game well worth the candle.

Thus Claycomb stood back in the darkness and sought an office window. Its shade lacked a few inches of being drawn; from beneath it came a slit of light. Peering in, Claycomb saw Ballard writing his resignation at Murdock's desk. He saw Ballard place this under a paperweight and then proceed to the vault. Only when Ballard began turning the knob did Claycomb whisper to his *mozo*—

"*Ahora*—now."

Arturo stepped stealthily around the corner of the building. Guillermo, facing the other way, saw nothing, heard nothing. With a mighty swish, the lead pipe descended. Guillermo did not know what hit him. He crumpled on the steps.

Claycomb came up and examined him. He found that Guillermo was not dead. That pleased Claycomb, for he wanted the watchman to revive later and give testimony.

Claycomb and Arturo pushed open the office door and peered in. They could not see Ballard. Ballard by then had entered the vault and was squatting inside before the safe.

The two raiders slipped quietly into the office. Arturo needed no further direction. He crept to the open vault door. Peering around it, he saw Ballard in the act of swinging open the door of the interior safe. Ballard took therefrom an envelop and was in the act of closing the safe when the lead pipe again descended.

It felled Ballard. The *mozo* dragged him out, dead to the world. He produced a feed sack from under his poncho and handed it to Claycomb.

Claycomb looted the safe. He stuffed into the sack not only the one hundred and eighty thousand pesos comprising the native payroll, but also some thirty envelops containing the savings of as many staffmen.

Then Claycomb took Ballard's resignation from under the paperweight. This, with a match, he burned to ashes. He whispered directions to his *mozo*. Arturo was broad, stocky, muscular. He picked up the inert form of Ballard and threw it over his shoulder. Claycomb took the money sack in one hand and Ballard's suitcase in the other. He did not want the suitcase to be found. The inevitable presumption must be, later, that it was packed with loot and carried away by an absconding accountant.

Claycomb turned out the light and left the office. Arturo, with Ballard slung over his shoulder, followed. Outside they stepped over the crumpled watchman and faded into the darkness. There was an alley between two rows of galvanized iron warehouses. With their several burdens, the two slipped down this alley.

Well clear of all buildings, they came to Claycomb's sedan. In it Ballard, the suitcase and the sack of money were speedily transferred to the Perro Verde mine.

WHEN Ballard came to his senses he was lying bound hand and foot on Claycomb's Chinese rug. He revived groggily, hearing, as he did so, the voices of Claycomb and the *mozo*. The pair were conversing in Spanish, a language which Ballard, in common with all the Cobrillo staffmen, understood quite well.

"Sufficient for both of us," Claycomb was saying. "More than three hundred thousand pesos."

Ballard opened his eyes and saw a heap of money on the table in front of Claycomb. The Englishman smiled; he

stroked the spike of his beard and his black eyes fixed lustfully on the loot. Ballard's urge was to shout a protest and strain at his bonds. He suppressed the urge and lay quietly on the rug. He had been tricked. Claycomb had used him as a tool. What, wondered Ballard in desperation, could he do about it?

There was a gleam of evil triumph on the scarred face of the Bolivian *mozo.*

"They will say, my master, that it was this runaway bookkeeper, no?" he cried eagerly.

"Why not?" chuckled Claycomb. "Who else will be missing from the camp? Did not the stupid watchman see him enter with the suitcase? Tomorrow many posses of *carabineros* will be scouring the pampa for this fool."

"They may search here!" worried Arturo.

"They will search here. They'll find nothing. The money we shall bury under the floor of the wine cellar."

"And the gringo? He must never be found!" cried Arturo.

He glanced toward Ballard. Deep in his eyes flashed the intent of murder.

"He must never be found," agreed Claycomb. "They will think he escaped to Bolivia, or perhaps caught an ore train to port. He must completely vanish, my *niño.*"

"You have reason, my master," assented Arturo.

From beneath his poncho he drew a long-bladed knife. He felt of its edge with his stubby, brown thumb.

"*Aqui no*—not here," warned Claycomb softly. "There must be no stain or sign of violence at this house. Take him out on the pampa. You know where the old *pozo hondo* is?"

"*Sí, señor mio.*"

Ballard shivered. He could predict his fate now. He too knew of a deep, abandoned shaft called the *pozo hondo.* The deep hole! It was about a mile north on the desert pampa. Years ago some of the Cobrillo staffmen had explored it. They had reported a shaft a hundred feet deep, from whose bottom led a series of blind tunnels. These tunnels led to various roomy, gloomy caverns, or *llamperas,* from which rich copper ore had long ago been extracted. But they led to no egress. Only by that single dark and deserted shaft, the *pozo hondo,* could that underground labyrinth be entered.

"It must be done without delay," suggested Claycomb in an oily whisper, averting his eyes from Ballard's.

"*Ahorita,*" agreed the *mozo.*

Right now! Ballard felt cold sweat break over his face.

"It is not well for the tire tracks of my car to lead to the *pozo,*" said Claycomb. "Better fetch a couple of mules."

Arturo went out to saddle two mules.

Ballard spoke for the first time. He said:

"Your skit, I take it, is to have the *mozo* pack me to the *pozo hondo* on a mule. When we arrive, he cuts my throat and then kicks me into the hole."

Claycomb shrugged. He fitted a cigaret into his ivory holder and blew rings of smoke toward Ballard. His cool villainy amazed Ballard.

"I'm leaving all details to Arturo," Claycomb answered blandly. Through a ring of smoke Ballard saw his face which, with the spiked beard, now bore a Mephistophelian aspect. Ballard strained impotently at his bonds. He would have given his life for a chance to clinch with Claycomb.

Claycomb produced a revolver from the table drawer. If Ballard succeeded in breaking the bonds, he sat ready to shoot.

Arturo came in and announced that the mules were ready.

The two carried Ballard outside. There stood a pair of saddled mules. Arturo cut the rope which bound Ballard's feet and the prisoner was hoisted astride a mule. The *mozo* retied his feet beneath the animal's belly. Ballard's hands were still bound behind his back.

Arturo mounted the other mule. They

were pack mules, used in trekking single file across the pampa. Thus when Arturo hit Ballard's mule on the flank and cried, *"Andele!"* the beast moved off in the desired direction.

Without a word Claycomb reentered his house.

Ballard rode ahead of the *mozo*. He was helpless and hopeless. He writhed, but could not free himself. He could not slide off because his feet were bound beneath the mule's belly.

They rode north toward the *pozo hondo*. There was now a pale moon. To the left, on a rising slope, Ballard could see a checkerboard of lights. A hundred meters apart they were, and they shone from thirty test rigs spotted systematically on the Cobrillo hill. Ballard shouted at the top of his voice.

No one answered. The nearest rig was half a mile away; each rig was chugging, making its own racket.

ON WENT the caravan of two mules, arriving finally at the *pozo hondo*. Arturo stopped the mules at its brink. He alighted. Since the only way to get Ballard off the mule was to cut the rope which secured his feet under the cinch, Arturo did so.

Here, Ballard thought desperately, might be his final chance. So he slid off on the other side of the mule. His hands were still bound. He faced Arturo across the beast's back. Arturo held the long-bladed knife. He grinned hideously in the pale light.

*"Andele!"* he said, and the mule stepped out from between them.

Ballard considered running, but his legs were stiff from the long binding. If he ran he'd be caught and stabbed in the back.

What about trying to kick the *mozo* under the chin? The same reason, stiffness in his legs, would operate against success. He saw that Arturo was looking at his legs, alert for a kick. He'd catch the leg, trip Ballard and then knife him as he rolled, wrist-bound, on the ground.

The only thing left was to butt with his head. Ballard saw that Arturo was standing with his back to the shaft. If he could butt this fellow into that shaft—

To think was to act. And Brick Ballard had once been a football fullback. He knew how to butt his head, with terrific force, into a man's stomach.

He dived now, with his hands tied behind him, aiming his head at Arturo's stomach.

It worked. It worked too well. The native screamed, doubled—and was knocked back over the lip of the *pozo*. But Ballard could not stop himself. Moreover, Arturo's hand had instinctively gripped the collar of his coat. The *mozo* toppled backward into the hole, dragging Ballard with him. Ballard had no free hand with which to grasp the edge of it. Into the *pozo hondo* went both men. They fell to a depth of a hundred feet.

It was not a free fall. For the shaft was only about four feet square, and Arturo, falling in a crosswise sprawl, scraped its walls with head and feet as he fell. Alternately his head scraped a roughness on one wall and his feet bumped some ledge of another. There was a series of these contacts each of which broke, for the fraction of a second, the descent.

And Ballard, dragged downward both by gravity and by the grip on his collar, could not fall faster than the *mozo*. Literally, he rode the *mozo's* body through the entire thirty meters of fall.

The two hit the bottom on a cushion of pampa dust which the wind had drifted into the shaft. Ballard was bruised, but did not even lose consciousness. He was in utter darkness. His hands were still bound at his back. He was shaken and groggy, sprawled in deep, soft dust athwart Arturo.

No movement or sound came from Arturo. Ballard twisted to his back and looked upward. Far above him, against a gray, square frame, he could see one

lonely desert star. He staggered to his feet. He could not see the *mozo*. But he could feel him. He kicked; Arturo did not respond. Arturo, falling first and crosswise, had taken most of the bumps and shocks. His neck, most likely, was broken.

Then Ballard recalled that the *mozo*, at the instant of being butted, had held a knife. The knife must have fallen with them into the pit. Ballard sat down. With his hands behind him he groped blindly, feeling in the dust for the knife. Finally he felt the edge of it. He rubbed his wrist bonds against that edge, awkwardly and persistently. It took him a sweating hour to free his hands.

With his hands free, he rubbed them to induce circulation. In his pocket he found a box of matches. He struck one. In its glare he saw Arturo. The man was dead.

Ballard searched him. He found a few coins, cigarets and a second box of matches. In his hip pocket he found what was, to Ballard at this moment, worth the ransom of a prince. It was a flat, tin flask, a canteen filled with water. Ballard knew that natives of the Atacama Desert, by the habit of generations, almost invariably carry water wherever they go. Here was a can of stale water worth twenty-four hours of life to Brick Ballard.

Again Ballard looked upward through the narrow, square shaft which framed a star. He knew he was only thirty meters deep in the desert. But it might as well be a mile, he conceded bitterly. He had no rope. It was certain that he could not climb those sheer walls.

He struck another match. Four black tunnels, leading from the bottom of the *pozo*, gaped at him. He had never explored them, but he had talked with men who had. He knew they wound from *llampera* to *llampera*, here pinching to the narrowest of aisles, there widening into green walled caverns. But they led to no daylight. Ballard knew that if he ever got out of this trap it must be through the same vertical path by which he had descended.

He squatted in the dust beside the corpse of the *mozo*. He drank a sip from the canteen. He laughed hollowly; the black tunnels echoed him, mocked his voice.

He said aloud:

"Here we are, a live one and a dead one. The *mozo* came to cut my throat and slither me into the hole. He wound up with a broken neck. But am I any better off?"

Then Ballard realized that the two mules must still be standing up above near the brim of the shaft. How long would they stand there? Until daylight? If so, they would be seen from afar. *Carabineros*, scouring the desert for an absconding accountant, might see the mules and come to investigate. Ballard could hail them from the bottom of the pit and be rescued.

But to what new fate? Ballard had a story to tell, but would the Cobrillo officials believe him? It would be his bare word against the denial of Don Juan Claycomb.

Claycomb would claim to know nothing about it. He would, at the first rumor of the rescue, remove the money from the wine cellar and hide it far away on the pampa. He would suggest that a thieving accountant, a-flight, must have been caught by the *mozo;* that the two had engaged in a conflict which had landed both in the shaft.

Authorities would as likely believe Claycomb as Ballard.

Squatting there at the bottom of the pit, Ballard waited forlornly. When he next looked upward the star was gone. Later another star took its place. Occasionally he heard the mules stamping impatiently near the brink.

GRADUALLY the square high above him became grayer. He knew that day was dawning on the desert. It had not fully dawned when Ballard's ears, keenly attentive, heard a crunch

on the gravel above ground, near the brim. He caught an explosive oath.

In despair, Ballard realized that the intruder must be Claycomb. Evidently Claycomb had worried at Arturo's failure to return. He must have feared that Ballard had escaped. Looking anxiously from his house at the first glimmer of dawn, he must have seen the two mules standing here stranded by this *pozo.* That would have brought Claycomb in a hurry. He would investigate, then lead the mules away.

Claycomb, thought Ballard, would doubtless shine a flash into the hole. The inspiration of desperation came to Ballard. Suppose that he could cause Claycomb to think Arturo was alive!

Presumably Claycomb would, in that case, rescue his *mozo.* He would let down a rope, tie the top end of the rope to the saddle horn of a mule, then mount the mule and ride a hundred feet in any direction. Ballard could seize the rope and be pulled out of the hole.

Quickly Ballard propped the *mozo's* corpse to a sitting posture against the wall, face turned upward. Then Ballard flung himself flat on his back at the bottom of the shaft. He closed his eyes.

He heard a scuffling sound up above. A falling pebble struck him on the cheek. Then Ballard became aware that a bull's-eye of light was shining full upon him. Its circle illumined two forms at the bottom of the deep shaft—a supine white man and a sitting native.

Ballard opened his eyes to mere slits. Framed against the tiny gray-blue square of sky he saw a human face peering down. He saw an arm extended, holding a bull's-eye flash. The face was Claycomb's.

"What ho?" cried Claycomb. "Arturo? Is that you?"

The voice rang so unnaturally through the shaft that Ballard knew his own voice, in answer, might easily deceive Claycomb. Ballard phrased his answer in Spanish.

"Don Juan! Master of mine, my leg is broke. A rope, *por Dios,* a rope!"

"What happened?" bellowed Claycomb.

"*Tombimos, los dos.* We both fell." Ballard groaned, then continued in Spanish, "The gringo he break the neck; with me it is only the leg. A rope, dear master, a rope!"

Claycomb, above, answered in Spanish. The very fact that he did so was proof that he thought himself speaking to the *mozo.* He said:

"Arturo, thou art a bungler and a fool. A bungler to let the Yank pull you in there; a fool to think I'll pull you out."

It had not occurred to Ballard that Claycomb would desert his own servant. For an instant the treachery shocked him, and then he realized that he should have expected nothing else. Since Claycomb hadn't balked at the murder of Ballard, why should he balk at the desertion of a mere *mozo?* Rescue of the *mozo* would mean the splitting of loot; his desertion would leave all of it to Claycomb.

But now Ballard saw a thing which shocked him to stupefaction. He saw the intent of a treachery more heinous than mere desertion. Claycomb's left hand, extending over the rim above, was still holding the flashlight. Now, in his right hand, appeared a pistol. He was aiming it directly downward. Flash and gun were both trained upon the dead Arturo, although the circle of light also encompassed the prone Ballard.

A panic possessed Ballard as Claycomb fired, deliberately and with exact aim, three times. Three bullets struck the corpse and toppled it over. The shock brought nausea to Ballard. He fainted. A few minutes later he was revived by dust falling upon him.

He looked up. No flash was now shining down. Claycomb was not in sight. Yet dust, by the shovelful, was being pitched into the shaft. He knew that Claycomb was endeavoring to cover two dead men in case a searcher, later today, should shine a light into the *pozo.*

Claycomb was taking his time about it, evidently being careful not to scrape too much dust from any one spot. He would avoid, Ballard realized, leaving any conspicuous mark of digging. He would scoop a little dust here, a little there, and then smooth the surface with the back of his shovel.

To keep from being buried, Ballard arose on all fours and crawled a little way into one of the tunnels. He crawled blindly, for he could see nothing. He turned. He could still hear the dust fall at intervals. After awhile it ceased. Ballard knew that Claycomb had gone away, taking the mules with him.

Striking a match, Ballard saw that the *mozo* was completely buried; a light flashed from above would not now expose him. Nevertheless, Ballard knew that there were three bullets in the corpse. Therefore he realized that Claycomb's guilt could be proven definitely, providing Ballard could get the ear of the outside world.

Technically Claycomb was not guilty of murder, because the *mozo's* neck had already been broken. But Claycomb thought he had murdered Arturo. And if confronted with three probed bullets and his own gun, he could be convicted. The loot could no doubt be recovered from the wine cellar. In any case he would be convicted and Ballard cleared, if—if Ballard himself could get out of the *pozo*.

A big *if!* It was all futile unless Ballard could escape.

He knew, too, that whatever he did he must do within twenty-four hours. After that respite, being without food and with only a slim canteen of water, he would perish.

Ballard set his jaw desperately. He decided to explore the tunnels, using his two boxes of matches for light. The tunnels had been explored before and he knew they led to no exit. And yet Ballard might be lucky enough to find two stout sticks or timbers each about five feet long. Perhaps two abandoned shovels or pick handles.

If he could find two sticks, he might wedge one of them from wall to wall across the shaft. Climbing thereon, he might reach up and wedge the other stick horizontally above him. Climbing to that, he might hang by his knees and disengage the first stick. In turn he might wedge that one above him. Thus it was barely possible that he might build his own ladder as he climbed.

The portals of four black tunnels confronted Ballard. He groped into one at random. After awhile he struck a match; he saw a gloomy, endless aisle ahead of him. He saw nothing which resembled a stick of wood. He groped desperately forward, now with a lighted match, now in inky darkness.

He came to a roomy space, a *llampera*, where perhaps a century before there had been an especially rich pocket of copper. Its walls were green; it was ghastly; it was like an empty cell in hell. On its floor Ballard saw a human skull and the head of a stone hammer; but there was no shovel, pick, stick or timber.

Ballard crossed the *llampera* and came again to a narrow tunnel. He pressed on, groping, fighting against despair. At places his passage was so narrow that he could barely wedge through. Here and there he was forced to crawl under a low ceiling; again he would pass through high, wide *llamperas*.

THE air was barely breathable. He found human bones, but no stick. In a sweat of dread he went on for an hour. He realized that he had burned half of his matches and that his strength was well nigh spent.

He decided to try one of the other tunnels.

Turning back, he groped, stumbled, crawled in the dark for another hour. He conserved his matches. He came at weary length to the shaft. He paused only long enough to cast a wistful glance

up at the square of blue sky.

Then he plunged resolutely into the opposite tunnel. This one led southwesterly, in the general direction of Cobrillo. He crawled along it, occasionally striking a match, for half an hour. He found no stick other than the rotted handle of a hammer. He went on, passing at times through *llamperas*. He became fainter all the while. He had used more than half his water and had less than a dozen matches. In Stygian darkness he pressed onward like a lost soul.

He came to a fork of tunnels. He was about to choose the left one when, to the right, he seemed to hear a faint throbbing, or pulsing, in the earth. For a moment he thought it was some trick of his brain.

Yet he listened—and he continued to hear, or sense, a distant thumping. It was not, he assured himself, a thumping in his own brain or heart. He put his ear to a wall. Yes, there was a rhythmic jar far away. Was it on the earth's surface above him? He knew it was not, because by now he must be fully five hundred feet, or possibly a thousand, underground. For an hour he had been groping southwest toward Cobrillo Hill. Therefore he must be well under that high eminence, hence deeper in the earth.

The thumping did not seem to be upward, but directly ahead of him. It sounded as if miners were tapping with their tools.

That, he conceded, was impossible. This mine had been unworked for a century. No living human other than himself could be within it. And yet there came a rhythmic pounding from somewhere far ahead along the right hand tunnel.

He groped forward into that dark aisle, resolved to explore its utmost reach. He had nothing to lose. Neither ghosts nor demons could make his plight worse.

He pressed onward, and the farther he went the more audible became that distant tapping. The sounds awoke echoes within his own maddening brain. He came to a cavern, traversed it, came again to a ceiling so low that he had to crawl. Beyond it he lay quietly on his back, panting. He sipped a niggardly sip from his canteen. He crawled onward again. Another cavern. Another low ceiling. Yet hope sprang in his breast; for the mysterious throbbing became more distinct all the while. It never ceased. Its tempo was rhythmic, regular; and at last Ballard realized that it could not be produced, directly, by any human agency. The interval between strokes was too exact. Between two successive throbs he counted seven. Again he counted seven. And again. Faithfully, inexorably at every count of seven, the earth throbbed.

Machinery! Only a machine could beat that even stroke.

And then the truth flashed to Brick Ballard.

The shock of it left him limp. He summoned his strength and crawled onward. He emerged once more into a high cavern. Beyond, an aisle continued, now wide, now narrow. The thumping was louder, nearer. It resounded with eery echoes down these black aisles and boomed in the caverns; it arose to the shrill pitch of a pagan tomtom; it deafened Ballard, and yet, indomitably, he crawled toward it.

He was crawling, flat on his stomach under a low ceiling, when he reached it. The aisle here was fairly wide, but only three feet high. He struck a match and saw a moving, vertical cable.

It was a steel cable one inch in diameter. It entered through a six-inch hole in the solid rock roof and disappeared into a six-inch hole in the floor. The cable was pumping slowly up and down.

The match burned Ballard's fingers. He dropped it. In the dark he tore at the necktie which was as red as his hair. He removed it. He fumbled through his pockets for a pencil; he found one, also a slip of paper.

He propped a lighted match against a stone and wrote:

Come quickly to the *Pozo Hondo.*
—CHARLES BALLARD

He tied the note to the red necktie. He tied the necktie to the cable. His match burned out. He fell prone in the darkness and waited.

The cable moved up, down, up, down, up, down, and at each downward stroke the earth roared under Ballard.

At last the cable became stationary. Then it began to ascend. Ballard struck another match and watched it, starkly fascinated. On up it went, and suddenly it was no longer a cable. It became a six-inch cylinder. A bit, a string of tools and a sample trap. All of it passed upward from Ballard's sight.

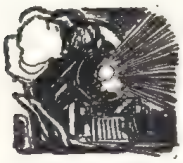
There was a hissing above him. It became fainter, more distant, then ceased. The stillness of a tomb weighed upon his heart. For an age he waited.

Then, at last, he heard again a hissing far above him. It descended, came nearer. It came on down like a tongue of flame riving the earth. Something stabbed past Ballard. It was a twenty-four-foot bit. Guided by its bore above, the bit struck neatly the bore below and passed on down. It came to rest.

Ballard struck his last match. There, at his elbow, was the upright cable. Tied to exactly the same spot on it was the red necktie. Tied to the necktie was a note. He despaired. They'd only reeled the line part way up, he thought, possibly to make some new hitch on the drum. Or perhaps—

And then, with a shock of elation, he saw that this was not the same slip of paper on which he himself had written. He snatched it and read:

Charles Ballard,
*Pozo Hondo.*
Coming.
—BRODIE, DRILLER
—VETCH, TOOL DRESSER
Test Rig 27



# *Old Dad Pound 'Em Hard*

By A. B. CLARK

ONCE in my dear old boomer days I fired for a short spell for old Bill Burton—better known as Old Dad Pound 'Em Hard—on the N. O. & W. out of New Orleans. Old Dad certainly deserved the name. He never made use of but three notches—full front, back, and occasionally, while standing, the center notch.

I got my ideas on preparedness from that old cuss. I soon learned by bitter experience always to be prepared for the old hogger, by always keeping the old mill loaded for bear. Upon getting a highball, Dad had a playful habit of kicking the Johnson bar down into the amen corner, and yanking the throttle somewhere back into the vicinity of the coal pit. I was caught once before I got next to Dad's cyclonic methods of making an exit from town. I got the fire-door open just in time to see the fire dancing like cherries over the bare grates, waving a fond farewell—to a volley of profanity from yours truly, the tallowpot.

Well, as a result of Dad's strenuous methods the old mill was soon leaking at every flue, seam and pore; and, in fact, became so decrepit that she was sent to the back-shop to undergo a sort of rejuvenating operation.

And she sure needed it. Say, old Dad had her fairly tied together with haywire and bell rope. The brakemen couldn't keep a brake club on the engine on account of Dad; he'd use it for a main or side rod key. Man, oh, man! When that old hogger started mauling that scrap heap over the back, she

fairly shed rod keys like a cat shedding hair. Her wedge bolts were something like a student brakeman—neither useful nor ornamental.

Some of the engineers, running on hot shots, used to brag about how square the valves were in their engines. They said that when they were pulling a drag uphill the exhaust would say:

"Come on over! Come on over!"

Dad's engine never talked that way. It sounded more like she was saying:

"Come over it! Come over it!" With emphasis on the over. Sometimes she'd stop saying anything, but, "Come, come, come!" Then Dad knew it was time to stop mighty quick and drive in another track spike, or tighten up a clamp. Yes, indeed! That old engine reminded me of a threshing machine that I ran in Kansas one season.

Figuratively speaking, we were doing business on a shoestring. Every time we broke down—which was blamed often—we'd borrow something from a farmer to tinker it up with. We had the old machine tied up with trace chains, bridle reins, burrs from farmers' wagons—every imaginable thing that we could bend, wrap or tie around that confounded scrap heap to hold it together. I remember that one day when we lost the pointer off the steam gage we borrowed that part of old Si Jones's spectacles which goes behind the ears to replace the lost pointer.

Old Dad's theory was to let one bolt hold that which had formerly been held by two or three. It didn't pan out very well with the headlight, however. That old, oil-burning contraption gradually dropped bolts until there remained but one bolt in one corner.

One night we were pulling a mixed train. As per usual, Old Pound 'Em Hard was mauling the old mill for all the speed he could get out of her, which wasn't much. I was spading the black diamonds into her, and I was tired.

Suddenly I heard the air swish as Dad kicked the brake-valve around into the big hole. About that time he squawked, "Jump!" and I unloaded. So did Dad, right on top of me. That danged old cuss couldn't jump on his own side, but had to jump from my side so I would act as a cushion for him.

The train came to a mighty quick stop, with a great screeching of brakes and banging of drawbars.

While I was lying there in the mud, with that locoed engineer sitting on me, the conductor came charging up. Man, he was some mad.

"Hey there!" he howled. "What's the meaning of stopping in this swamp? This ain't no siding. Every passenger in that car swapped seats, and every one standing up sat down, and every one sitting down stood up."

Dad just sat there and goggled at the conductor like an ape. He croaked—

"Did we hit?"

"Hit who? What?" yelped the con. "I don't see nothing to hit."

Dad hopped up mighty quick, struck a posture of Andy Jackson at the battle of New Orleans, and yammered:

"Joe, I'm a hero. I've saved every critter on this train. I saw a train come a-tearing around that curve, and I stopped in time to keep from having a head-on collision.

"Curve? What curve?" howled the con. "They ain't a curve in five miles."

"Then they were heading out of a switch," argued Dad.

"They ain't no switch this side of Poydras," sputtered the con, who was as mad as a setting hen by that time.

Old Dad was getting peeved, too.

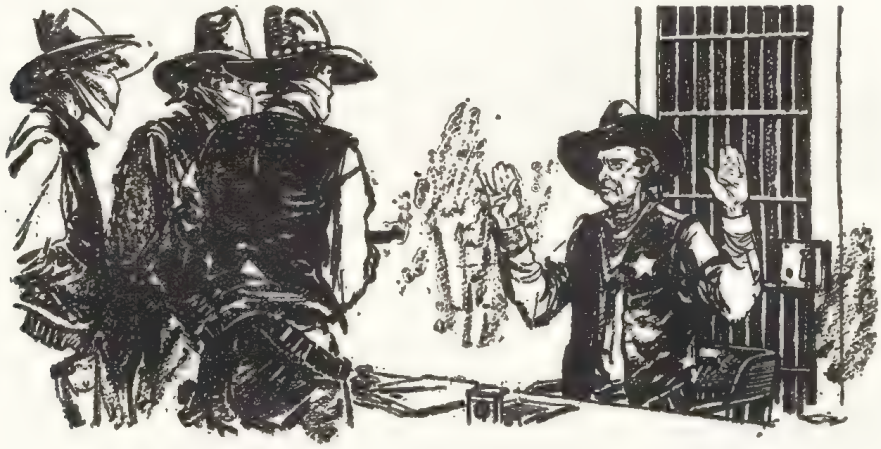
"Come on up ahead, you blue-coated monkey!" he snapped. "I'll show you their headlight that came popping around the curve."

Arguing like a couple of magpies, they walked ahead to the engine and there was a headlight shining ahead of the engine. But it was the one on Dad's engine.

The sole remaining bolt holding it had worked loose, and when we struck a low joint the headlight had swung around and shone square in Dad's face!

*Concluding*

# The GHOST RIDERS



By W. C. TUTTLE

***The Story Thus Far:***

DON SHIEL went to prison for three years because Parke Deal and Buck Halstead swore they had caught him and his father running their Lazy S brand, on Quarter Circle E horses, for whose owner, Jim Edwards, the accusing pair were riders.

The day before Don returned home, his father died of the old gunshot wounds Deal and Halstead had inflicted; and the young man found his Lazy S ranch depleted of stock by rustlers. His two faithful old cowpunchers, Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson, told him that Frank Eldon, the banker, held a mortgage on the place for ten thousand dollars. The cowboys said they believed his father had never seen any of that money; and further informed him that Deal, in some strange way, had got enough capital together to purchase the Bar D ranch.

Simultaneous with Don's return, three mysterious riders began to terrorize the Lazy Moon Valley. The trio, always muffled in white, became known as the galloping ghosts. Parke Deal said openly that he believed the riders to be Old Hopeful and Spud Gilson, led by Don Shiel. Don went to Deal and warned him to keep his mouth shut.

On the night he was to marry Clare, daughter of Jim Edwards, owner of the Quarter Circle E, John Eldon, son of the banker, was murdered by the ghosts. Frank Eldon, crazy with grief, swore Don Shiel had committed the crime because of jealousy. Rusty Roberts, the sheriff, refused to make an arrest; so Eldon hired a private detective to shadow Don. The first time the cowboy met the detective, Sidney Byers, he threatened to kill him if he ever set foot on the Lazy S ranch again.

Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens, two wandering cowboys, heard of the ghosts in the Lazy Moon Valley and were proceeding there when Sleepy's horse was accidentally killed. After purchasing another, bearing the Circle JB brand, of a man named Sherill, in the town of Roulette, they rode on. That night they took refuge from a rainstorm in the Lazy S barn; and at daybreak the next morning, by chance, they saw Don Shiel, Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson removing the body of a dead man from the corral. Riding on into town later in the day, the two cowboys learned that Eldon's detective, whom Don Shiel had been heard to threaten, had been found murdered a short distance from the Lazy S ranch.

That night the three ghosts stuck up Eldon's bank and got away with twelve thousand dollars. The banker swore he had recognized Don Shiel as the leader, and a reward was offered for his capture.

The next day Hashknife and Sleepy were on the way out to the Lazy S when, in the distance, they saw the sheriff and his deputy, Silver Linin' Smith, approaching with Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson in handcuffs. As they watched, the two cowboys saw Don Shiel suddenly ride out of the brush and hold up the officers. It was apparent that Shiel did not intend to see his faithful old cowboys lodged in jail without some sort of resistance. At that moment a shot sounded, and Don Shiel pitched off his horse.

A RIDER was spurring down the brushy slope behind the old building, across an old wash and out to the road.

"Parke Deal!" snorted Hashknife, and swung into his saddle.

They were examining Don as the two cowboys rode up, and Hashknife dismounted to assist them. At first glance it seemed that the bullet had torn half of Shiel's head away, but a closer inspection proved that it was merely a scalp wound, deep enough for the shock to have knocked Don off his horse.

"I've been follerin' him quite awhile," said Deal nervously.

"You have?" queried the sheriff, watching Hashknife bind up the wound.

"I knew you'd be after him this mornin'; so I came in early and watched the house. I reckon he was expectin' you, 'cause he slipped out just ahead of you and Silver Linin'; and I trailed him ever since. Lucky for you I did."

"Deal," said old Hopeful, "they can't keep handcuffs on me all m' life. No, sir, they've got to let me loose sometime, and when they do, I'm goin' to come back and kill you. And I'm not goin' to give you an even break."

"You won't live that long," said Deal.

"I'll live a damn sight longer than you will."

Don opened his eyes, but he was still dazed. His hand went to his head and he blinked wonderingly.

"How do you feel?" asked Hashknife.

"Fine—" weakly. "Everythin' spins around."

"Yeah, it would."

"Well, let's get him on his horse and headed for jail," suggested Parke Deal.

"He couldn't ride a horse," replied Hashknife.

"Tie him on."

Hashknife got to his feet and turned on Deal.

"Since when did you start bossin' the law, Deal? This man is hurt, and there's no use torturin' him. In fact, if you care to know it, we're not goin' to torture him. Rowdy, you take your two prisoners to town and bring back a rig for Shiel. Silver Linin' can stay here and see that your prisoner is here when you come back."

"That's a good idea," admitted the sheriff.

"Since when did *you* start bossin' the law?" asked Parke Deal.

"Right now!" snapped Hashknife. "And I don't care to hear any arguments from a man who shoots from the brush."

"Shoots from the brush? With him wanted for murder and robbery, and him stickin' up the sheriff—"

"Was it any of your business?" asked Hashknife.

"It's the business of every good citizen—"

"True enough—which ruins your argument."

Deal shrugged his shoulders, but subsided. He didn't like the glint of those gray eyes—and this was no time or place to start trouble. Deal went along with the sheriff and the two prisoners, while the three men made Don as comfortable as possible.

"Didja have any trouble arrestin' the two old boys?" asked Sleepy.

"Not a bit; they wasn't expectin' it. I tell you I don't like this at all. They'll charge Shiel with a couple murders and a robbery, and hold Hopeful and Spud as his partners in crime. Folks around here don't like to wait for the law to decide things like this, and it'll be more than a month at least before the next session of court."

"Jail fairly strong?" queried Hashknife, smiling quizzically.

"Fairly—yeah. But they don't usually have to tear it all down."

"Did you and Rowdy search the Lazy S?"

"We shore did, but we didn't find anythin'—not even a shotgun. Old Hopeful says he don't know where the shotgun is."

"Did they have any horses handy?"

"Dang it, yes! There's three in the corral, and I forgot to turn 'em out. Well, that means another trip out there."

"Sleepy, you stay here with Silver Linin' and I'll turn 'em out."

HASHKNIFE mounted his horse and rode out to the Lazy S, where he roped the three horses and examined their hoofs. None of them wore shoes corresponding to the tracks he had found.

He made a search of the buildings, but found nothing which might incriminate any one from the Lazy S, and he was standing on the porch of the ranch-house when he saw a small gray horse coming toward the stable. The animal was nearly a mile away, but Hashknife sat down and waited until it came up to the corral. It was so gentle that Hashknife had no trouble in roping it.

The shoes on the gray were identical with the marks he had found behind the bank and inside the old shack beside the road. But the brand was the Lazy S. He turned out the other horses and went back to his mount. He was satisfied in his own mind that the little gray had traveled considerable distance in getting back home, not merely working its way back, because the animal had made no stop to graze during the last mile.

Buggy tracks at the spot where he had left Sleepy and Silver Linin' with Don Shiel proved that they had taken the wounded man to town. Del Sur was rather excited over the arrest of the three men. The doctor had patched up Don's head, and Don was fully conscious now. Hopeful and Spud were as spiteful as a pair of old badgers in captivity.

They did not seem so concerned about themselves, but their hatred was directed toward Parke Deal.

"The dirty bushwhackin' coyote," growled Hopeful. "You jist turn me loose, give him two guns and gimme a umbreller, and I'll run him out of the county, the dang coward."

"Whatcha need the umbreller fer?" asked Spud.

"T' keep me dry in case it rains 'fore I can git back."

Hashknife talked with Edwards, who declared that Shiel and his two men would easily be convicted.

"It's as sure as death or taxes, Hartley. Eldon will swear that Shiel was the man who robbed him, and it stands to reason that Hopeful and Spud are the other two men. They'll be charged with first degree murder jist as sure as anythin'."

Hashknife merely smiled as he hitched up his belt.

"Is there any way of gettin' to Roulette without goin' around by Nash and Henderson?" he asked.

"There's an old trail, headin' in through that big canyon over there. It ain't built for speed, but it cuts the distance down to less than twenty miles."

"About how long does it take for a letter to go to Roulette?"

"Well, you'd have to figure on two days. Do you know somebody in Roulette?"

"Clint Reith and Jim Sherill," lied Hashknife.

"I know both of 'em very well, Hartley. Give 'em my regards, will you?"

"I'll do that," said Hashknife, and went over to the post office, where he purchased some writing paper, envelops and stamps.

He found Sleepy at the sheriff's office and called him aside.

"I'm takin' a ride," he told Sleepy. "May be back by mornin'. If anybody asks for me, you don't know where I went."

Sleepy agreed and asked no questions. He knew it would be a waste of breath. Rowdy saw Hashknife ride out of town, and he asked Sleepy where Hashknife was going.

"Don't ask me," replied Sleepy.

Rowdy snorted and walked away. He met Edwards and Deal in front of the Lazy Moon Saloon, and they were talking about Hashknife.

"I've stood all his lip I'm goin' to," declared Deal, as the sheriff came up.

"We were discussin' Hartley," explained Edwards. "He just rode out of town."

"Yeah, I seen him go and I wondered where he went."

"I think he's gone to Roulette," said Edwards. "He asked me how to find the

trail across the hills."

"Oh, yeah—" Rowdy nodded—"he told me he knew Clint and Jim."

Silver Linin' and Sleepy came across the street, and Deal said to Sleepy—

"Stevens, did you ever meet Clint Reith?"

"Clint Reith? No-o-o, I don't reckon I ever did."

"You knew Jim Sherill, didn't you?"

"Sherill? Oh, yeah, he's the feller I got my horse from over at Roulette. No, I never was introduced to him."

"Did your pardner know either of 'em?"

"Hashknife? Nope, I don't reckon he did."

Edwards turned to Rowdy.

"I wonder why he lied about it?"

"Stevens?"

"No—Hartley."

"Oh, I dunno. I reckon it's natural for a cowpuncher to lie. I've got too many troubles of my own to worry about anythin' else."

"I reckon that's right," agreed Edwards. "I was wonderin' if this Hartley is workin' for the Cattlemen's Association."

"Detective?" asked Deal.

"You've got me," admitted Rowdy. "When I talk about Don bein' easy to convict, he laughs at me. When I get a good idea on somethin', he ruins it with one word. I'll be damned if I spend any more time tryin' to figure him out."

"He don't tell you anythin'," said Edwards.

"Tell you! I'll bet he don't."

"But he asks plenty questions." Edwards smiled.

"Queer questions. The other day he asked me if I was sure Buck Halstead was dragged to death by a horse."

"What does he know about Buck Halstead?" queried Deal.

"Nothin'—jist wanted to know. Asked me if I knew that somebody killed Byers nearer town before the rain, kept the body and horse dry until after the rain, and then—"

"What did he mean?" asked Edwards quickly.

"I dunno, I tell you. He's a queer jigger. Speakin' of Clint Reith, I remember Hartley lookin' through the brand register, and he asked me a lot of questions about the Circle JB and the Shamrock."

"He must be full of curiosity," said Edwards.

"And curiosity killed the cat." Parke Deal smiled.

"That's what they say—" Rowdy smiled—"but I'd hate to bet on it in this case. My opinion is that Hartley is bad medicine in a fight. He don't pack that black handled Colt as an ornament. And he's got the eyes of a man who don't scare worth a damn."

"When does Shiel and the two men have their hearin'?" asked Deal.

"Mebbe tomorrow. You'll be here?"

"I shore will."

Rowdy went back to his office and later he met Sleepy.

"Did Hashknife say when he'd be back from Roulette?" asked Rowdy.

"Did he start for Roulette?" asked Sleepy.

"Oh, go to hell!" snorted Rowdy, and went on.

LAZY MOON VALLEY came to the hearing of Don Shiel, Hopeful and Spud, which had been delayed three days. It was rather a stormy hearing, in which Frank Eldon swore to the identity of Don Shiel as being the man who robbed the bank.

But Eldon was not satisfied with the robbery charge. He tried to present evidence which might show that Don had killed John Eldon; but the prosecuting attorney would not admit this evidence. The crowd was against the attorney, but he was firm.

"The evidence of robbery is conclusive enough to bind these men over to the superior court on a robbery charge," said the attorney. "Mr. Eldon's testimony would do that. But there is nothing but suspicion of a murder. The sheriff admits that he has found nothing to prove a mur-

der charge against them. The murder of John Eldon was committed by three horsemen clad in white. Eldon testifies that the three men, one of whom robbed him, were in white. The testimony of Silver Linin' and Chick Hatch would prove the same, except that both men admit having had enough drinks to make them color blind. As far as that goes, any three men might have dressed in that way. There is nothing to prove that the same three white clad men killed John Eldon and robbed the bank. And as for the murder of Sidney Byers—that is a mystery."

There were growls from several parts of the room, but the prosecutor was somewhat of a fighter himself, and they did not bother him. He proceeded to bind the three men over to the superior court, charging them with bank robbery, and the hearing was over.

But the crowd was not satisfied. They grouped around, discussing the hearing. Frank Eldon was righteously indignant, and there were many to listen to what he had to say. Hashknife circulated around, listening here and there, and later he found Rowdy with Silver Linin'. The sheriff seemed worried, as he asked Hashknife what the crowd seemed to think of the hearing.

"Not so good, accordin' to what I've heard. Somebody ought to muzzle Frank Eldon."

"You don't think there's any danger of the folks takin' a hand, do you, Hartley?"

"More than you think."

Rowdy scratched his nose violently.

"Law abidin' citizens!" he snorted.

"As long as the law suits 'em," said Hashknife. "After that they act like a pack of wolves. How is Don Shiel feelin' today?"

Rowdy indicated the rear of the place with a jerk of his head.

"The girl's in there with him now. She don't seem to mind what the people say, 'cause she don't think Don's guilty. My Gawd, a woman's hard to convince when she likes a man."

Clare came from the jail, but stopped short at sight of Hashknife.

"I suppose you are sorry the ghosts have stopped riding," she said evenly.

"It's time," said Hashknife seriously, and Clare walked on, her head held high.

"What did she mean?" queried Rowdy.

"Oh, just a little joke between us."

"It sounded like a joke—" dryly.

"Kind of a rough one—on her. Rowdy, will you let me have a few words with Don Shiel?"

"Want to ask questions?"

"If I happen to think of a good one."

Hashknife walked back into the jail and stopped in front of Don's cell. Old Hopeful and Spud gave him a friendly greeting, but Don was not so pleased to meet him. Hashknife thought perhaps Clare had told him about Hashknife's wanting Don at large, so that the ghosts would keep on galloping.

"I'm alone," said Hashknife, "and anythin' you say won't go any further, Shiel. You own a little gray horse, a gentle little animal, wearin' your brand. How long since you seen him?"

Don frowned thoughtfully and finally turned to Hopeful, who shook his head.

"He means that little Panamint gray," said Spud.

"I don't remember him," said Don.

"We got him after you left," said Hopeful. "I ain't seen him for a month."

"Have you got a shotgun on your ranch?"

"Did have when I left here," said Don.

"I ain't seen that gun for ages," said Hopeful. "I dunno what became of it."

Hashknife felt that these men were telling the truth. He leaned in close and lowered his voice.

"Shiel, me and my pardner saw you at your corral the mornin' after the big rain, and we saw you dispose of Byers' body."

Hopeful peered at Hashknife, his old face twisted painfully, his gnarled hands clutching the bars. His shoulders slumped wearily and he said—

"Lawd a'mighty, that cooks our goose."

"Not necessarily," said Hashknife.

Don shook his head, lips shut tightly. Finally he spoke:

"Hartley, I—I didn't think anybody saw us do that. At least, I didn't expect a stranger to see it, but I did think some one would. Why have you kept this to yourself all this time?"

"All my life I've went by the theory that you shouldn't believe half you hear nor half you actually see, Shiel."

"Do you think we killed Byers?" asked Spud shakily.

"I did, until I saw that Byers had been left out in the rain. You see, I don't think any of you three are crazy enough to kill a man and leave the body in plain sight."

"The horse was tied in the stable," said Spud.

"Hartley," said Don hoarsely, "I'm not tryin' to prove any alibi, but that was a dirty plant. Somebody left that body in my corral."

"I know it, Shiel; but you'd have a awful time provin' it to the jury; so I'm not goin' to tell anybody. Forget this end of it."

"But you think we are the three ghosts."

"Who said I did?"

Don flushed.

"Clare said—"

Hashknife laughed.

"She misconstrued my meanin' when I said I didn't want you caught 'cause I wanted the ghosts to keep gallopin'."

"I know what you mean!" exploded Hopeful.

Hashknife scratched his head as if puzzled and asked—

"Shiel, what became of the mortgage money paid to your father?"

"I wish I knew."

"Have you lost any horses?"

"Not that I can prove, Hartley."

"Well, I guess that's all."

Don lighted a cigaret and peered into the smoke.

"Will you do somethin' for me, Hartley?" he asked.

"Anythin' I can do."

"Find out who witnessed that mortgage."

"You haven't seen it?"

"No."

HASHKNIFE took the sheriff with him, but Eldon had closed the bank; so Hashknife suggested that they go and look at the filing notice, which would be an accurate transcript of the original. It was a simple matter to look at the filing, and they discovered that Parke Deal witnessed it. Hashknife examined all the details, and they went back to tell Don.

"So Parke Deal witnessed it, eh?" muttered Don. "How was my dad's name signed?"

"Signed in full—Daniel H. Shiel," said Hashknife.

Don blinked for a moment and he looked curiously at Hashknife. The sheriff was speaking to Hopeful, as Don lifted his right hand and made a motion with his forefinger. Hashknife knew what he meant. For several moments they looked closely at each other, and Hashknife shook his head.

"I reckon that's all, Rowdy," said Hashknife.

"Thank you both," said Don.

"Thank you for rememberin'," returned Hashknife.

Rowdy looked curiously at Hashknife, wondering what he meant by that last remark, but Hashknife began humming a tune and walked out of the office. Sleepy was standing near the doorway, but Hashknife paid no attention to him. Silver Linin', tilted back in the sheriff's chair, laughed at the expression on Sleepy's face.

"How long has he been doin' that?" asked Sleepy.

"Doin' what?" grunted the sheriff.

"Hummin' a tune thataway."

"I didn't notice it."

"If you knew him as well as I do, you would. Well—" resignedly—"it's taken him longer than usual."

"What in hell are you talkin' about, anyway?"

"You jist wait and see."

The stage came in from Nash, bringing the mail; so Hashknife went over to the post office, where Parke Deal, Jim Edwards and several other men were waiting for their mail. They were more grim than

usual and none of them recognized him by word or gesture.

He noticed that Parke Deal read a letter which caused him to frown thoughtfully. He shoved the letter deep in his pocket as Edwards spoke to him, and they all went back to the saloon.

It was soon after this that Hashknife, still humming a tune, went down to the livery stable, saddled his horse and rode out of town; Sleepy saw him from the sheriff's office, but did not go to find out why he was riding away. Sleepy was too thoroughly accustomed to Hashknife's methods to ask questions.

Once out of town Hashknife rode swiftly over the hard road. He had never been at the Bar D ranch, but he knew the location. With Parke Deal in town, he knew the ranch was deserted. But Hashknife was cautious. He left his horse in a thicket behind the stables and walked toward the barn.

There was no one to answer his loud knocking at the door; so he went to the stable and made a thorough search. He found the house unlocked. It was a one-story, four-room place, which he searched swiftly, but he could not find what he sought.

He was standing in the middle of the kitchen, looking around, when a sound outside attracted him to a window. Parke Deal had ridden up to the house and was dismounting. There was no chance for Hashknife to escape detection. Parke tied his horse to a ring bolt at the side of the house, and Hashknife swore softly, desperately.

Almost at his feet was a sunken ring —the handle for lifting a cellar door. It was his only hope.

Quickly he grasped the ring, lifted the old door and slid under it. Twisting quickly, he lowered it with his shoulders, as Deal swung open the kitchen door and came in.

Crouching on the moldy old steps in the utter blackness, Hashknife gave a sigh of relief as he heard Parke walk over the trapdoor and go into another room.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GUILT

"NOW listen, Ma; there ain't a thing I can do," protested Farrell, the blacksmith, as he scrubbed his grimy arms over the wash basin.

Mrs. Farrell, a big, husky, red faced, motherly sort of woman, rested a hand on each hip and eyed her brawny husband disgustedly.

"You can go and offer your help to the sheriff. It ain't civilized, that's what it ain't, Dave. Them men ain't got no right to take the law in their own hands."

"That part's all right, Ma," replied Farrell, wiping his face violently. "Prob'ly you're right. But the boys say that the law didn't work right in this case. All they're holdin' 'em for is robbery. You can't overlook murder, Ma. It's got to be stopped."

"I suppose you'll help 'em."

"I ain't goin' to help nobody. I'm keepin' out of it entirely. As far as helpin' the sheriff is concerned, he don't need any help. Rowdy will do what he can to protect his prisoners, but he ain't goin' to kill anybody, and he ain't goin' to git himself killed."

"Dave, are you sure they'll raid the jail tonight?"

"No, I ain't sure."

"Who will lead 'em—Parke Deal or Jim Edwards?"

"Now, Ma, don't ask me a thing like that. Don'tcha realize that every man in that mob could be sent to the penitentiary?"

"They will be if I have anythin' to do with it."

"Yeah, and I'll have to quit blacksmithin' in this town, 'cause I wouldn't have any customers left. No, Ma, you stay right here."

Dave Farrell glanced quickly toward the stairs, realizing that neither of them had made any effort to lower their voices.

"Clare's up there," said Mrs. Farrell softly. "Edna ain't got in from school yet."

Some one knocked at the front door, and Mrs. Farrell went to find Jim Edwards on the front porch.

"Is Clare here?" he asked.

"I'll call her, Jim," said Mrs. Farrell, but there was no need to call.

Clare had heard her father's voice. Her face was white but firm as she came down the stairs. Edwards's face was grim, unrelenting.

"I know all about it," said Clare. "You are one of the leaders in the movement to lynch Don Shiel and his two men. Don't you realize that there is a law to punish men who do things like that?"

"I didn't come down here to debate the morals of the case," Edwards told her. "I came to ask you to come back home. Your mother wants you."

"I'm sorry to cause mother any pain, but I'm not going home, dad."

"What earthly good can you do here? Why act foolish?"

"I am acting according to my own conscience. I do not believe Don is guilty of these things."

"No-o-o-o? He was guilty once. Why not again?"

"He was not guilty once."

"He confessed."

"Yes, to save his old father from prison. He couldn't save himself; so he lied himself into prison to save his father. Oh, I know none of you believe it. I know what they're saying about me."

"You don't know half of it, Clare. If Don Shiel wasn't guilty, why did he run away when you carried him a warning?"

"Because the law wouldn't give him a chance."

"Is that so? It seems to me that the law is givin' him better than an even break."

"I suppose Parke Deal is a hero to you."

Edwards laughed shortly.

"No, I wouldn't say that; but it was the only way to take Shiel, it seems."

Clare shook her head sadly.

"Dad, I'm sorry we are on opposite sides of the fence in this matter; but I'm going to keep on fighting for Don Shiel. I have as much right to help him as you have to harm him."

"That's true. Clare, you've got more fightin' blood in you than I ever realized. I wish you'd been born a boy."

"I wish I had; I'd go out there and whip your whole gang."

"By gad, I believe you'd make a stab at it. Good night."

He turned on his heel and stalked away. Down inside him, Jim Edwards admired his daughter's courage, and he was in a savage frame of mind when he met Frank Eldon. Somehow the sniveling old man grated on his nerves.

"The sheriff acts as though he knew something was afoot, Jim," imparted the old banker.

"He's no damn fool!" snapped Edwards.

"No, no, I didn't mean that. However, it will be all right. The boys will meet late tonight at my house. Tim Crowley and five of his boys are here from Nash, and Slim Evarts brought in two from Henderson. And I just saw Clint Reith and Jim Sherill from Roulette. They have no interest in the matter, except that they hate horsethieves."

Jim Edwards scowled thoughtfully.

"Did you pay that reward to Parke Deal?"

"Not yet. There is a question in my mind whether the sheriff or Parke will get credit. If I decide that the sheriff did it, of course I shall not pay the reward, because he is already paid to enforce the law."

Edwards laughed shortly.

"I can see who will get the credit."

A few minutes later Edwards met Clint Reith, a rather small, thin faced, wiry cowman, possibly forty years of age.

"Just over for a visit, Clint?" asked Edwards.

"Yeah, jist lookin' around. Have you seen Parke Deal today?"

"He was here earlier, but went home. He'll be back later."

Rowdy and Silver Linin' were troubled. It was the first time they had ever felt in any danger of losing a prisoner. The sentiment seemed all against the three pris-

oners, and the prosecuting attorney was bitterly censured for not placing a murder charge against them.

"But damn it, it's a penitentiary offense to take a prisoner out and lynch him," said Silver Linin'.

"Who'd ever convict 'em?" asked Rowdy. "Where'd you git a jury in Lazy Moon Valley to convict 'em? Me and you might git on the stand and swear to every man in the gang, and all it would git us would be a coat of tar and feathers. This—" solemnly— "is a hell of a situation."

Sleepy went to supper with Silver Linin', and then they went back to the office and let Rowdy appease his appetite. Sleepy was just a little anxious about Hashknife. He would feel better as soon as the tall cowboy came back to town. Rowdy came back after his supper and ordered Silver Linin' to stay at the office.

"I'm goin' to glue m' ear to the ground," he told them. "If it comes to a showdown I'll take the boys out and night herd 'em."

"Keep your eyes on Tim Crowley and Slim Evarts," warned Silver Linin'. "They ain't up here for no good. How about havin' horses all ready for a getaway?"

"I'm afraid they're watchin' too close."

SLEEPY went away with the sheriff, leaving Silver Linin' tilted back in the sheriff's chair, his feet on the desk, wishing he was a cowpuncher again instead of a peace officer with encumbrances.

He went back and talked with the prisoners. Don had heard enough to realize that things were not just right around the town, and he asked the deputy about it.

"I dunno," replied Silver Linin'. "Mostly talk, I reckon."

As he came back to the connecting door he grunted with surprise at sight of Clare Edwards.

"Well, howdy!" he blurted. "Set down, won't you, Clare? I'm sorry, but I can't let you talk with the prisoners. You see, I—"

"I didn't come to talk with them," she said evenly.

"Didn'tcha? Sa-a-ay! What's the matter with you; you're as white as plaster. Don'tcha feel well?"

Clare was wearing a black lace mantilla over her shoulders, and it increased the pallor of her face. Suddenly her right hand came from under the mantilla gripping a heavy Colt revolver. The unwavering muzzle pointed directly at Silver Linin's middle.

"He-e-e-ey!" he gasped. "Don't do that! Well, for heaven's sake, Clare, don't shoot!"

His hands went above his head, and he goggled at her foolishly. He felt that she would not hesitate to pull the trigger.

"Back up to the cells," she said in a hoarse whisper. She drove him back down the corridor, where she took his gun.

"Unlock both cells," she ordered.

"Good Lord, you can't do a thing like that—oh, well, I s'pose you can."

He unlocked the cells and swung the doors wide. Without a word she handed Don Shiel the gun she took from Silver Linin'.

"Clare, what does this mean?" asked Don dazedly.

"Please, Don, don't ask questions." And to Silver Linin', "We're going out the back way and around to Farrell's house."

Silver Linin' chuckled softly as he unlocked the back door.

"Clare, I'm a hell of a deputy, I am. But I'm glad. Neither of you need to tire your arms in keepin' me covered; I'm whipped."

"Glory to cats!" snorted Hopeful. "Loose ag'in."

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" warned Silver Linin'. "Don't advertise it, you darn fool. This town is settin' on edge right now."

Don was close to Clare, his hand on her arm.

"Oh, it was wonderful of you," he said softly. "But after all, what is the good of it, Clare? It means that the three of us will have to leave the valley; dodge the law all our lives, leave everything and everybody we care anything about."

"It's a fightin' chance," said Silver Linin', overhearing the last of Don's remark.

"That's true—a fightin' chance," said Don.

None of them seemed to think it queer that a deputy sheriff should fall in with their plans.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Parke Deal rode into Del Sur. He dismounted in front of the general store, and as he came into the light of the windows he met Clint Reith. Deal glanced quickly around before he said to Reith:

"Hello, Clint; what's wrong? I got your letter—"

"You got *my* letter?"

"Sure, I got it. You said to meet you here in Del Sur tonight, 'cause somethin' had gone wrong."

"What in hell are you talkin' about, Parke? Your letter said—"

"I never wrote you any letter."

"Well—now wait a minute; I never wrote *you* any letter."

"You didn't? The letter said that there had been a leak in the game, and you thought it was here at this end of the thing, and you wanted to see me here tonight."

"But I never wrote it!"

"Well, who in hell did?"

"I don't like this," said Deal nervously. "Somethin' queer, Clint. Both of us gettin' letters from each other, and neither of us writin' them. I'd like to—" Deal hesitated. "Clint, do you know a feller named Hashknife Hartley?"

"Never heard of him."

"Jim Sherill sold a horse to the sheriff of Lodge Pole, who had killed a horse belongin' to Hartley's pardner."

"Jim told me about that. But I don't see—"

"Neither do I; but I'm bettin' he wrote them letters."

"Detective?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know. He went to Roulette, and I'll bet it was to post a letter to me."

"What does he look like, Parke?"

"We'll find him. Damn him, if he's a detective—"

"But what could he know?"

"He knew enough to write them letters—" savagely.

"That's plenty," agreed Reith.

Sleepy was coming from the Lazy Moon Saloon and met them as they came in, but they paid no attention to him. He went down to the livery stable and was greatly relieved to see Hashknife unsaddling. By the light of the stable lantern he could see that Hashknife's clothes were dirty, his face streaked with dirt.

"What's new?" asked Hashknife.

"Nothin' startlin'. That Sherill person we got the sorrel from in Roulette is in town, with a feller named Reith. I seen him and Parke Deal together just a few minutes ago. Rowdy's scared of a lynchin'; so he's ridin' herd on the saloon, while Silver Linin' takes care of the prisoners."

"That's fine." Hashknife smiled. "Let's sneak up and see how Silver Linin' is standin' the pressure. But go careful, pardner. We're on a powder keg and the fuse is burnin' short."

"How short?"

"Inches."

THEY stood in the shadow of the sheriff's office for several moments before going inside. The office was empty; so they went back into the corridor, only to find the doors of the cells swinging wide open, the prisoners gone.

"What do you make of that?" wondered Hashknife.

"Well, it shore looks funny. I wonder if Silver Linin' lost his nerve and took 'em away. No, I don't believe it; and it's a cinch the gang never took 'em out. What's the answer?"

Hashknife shook his head and led the way out through the rear door, which had been left open. They circled in through an alley, stopping against the sidewalk near the corner of a store, as a man came up to the front of the building. It was Jim Sherill, the man from Roulette.

They did not know it, but Sherill was trying to locate them for Parke Deal and Clint Reith. After seeing who was in the

store, Sherill came sauntering on, but jerked back violently when Hashknife's sixshooter jabbed him in the side and Hashknife drawled:

"One little yip, and you go out on a hot bullet, Sherill. Don't say a word. Turn around."

Sleepy deftly slipped Sherill's gun out of his holster.

"What kind of a damn holdup is this?" demanded Sherill, as they prodded him down the alley and around to the rear door of the jail.

"A new kind," chuckled Hashknife. "We had a little gilded cage, and you're the first birdie we could get our hands on."

They clicked the lock behind him, and he turned on them angrily.

"Damn you, what's the charge?" he rasped.

"No charge at all." Hashknife laughed. "Free board and lodgin'."

They went out the back way, and Sleepy wanted an explanation.

"It was plumb inspiration," chuckled Hashknife, "and makes one less to watch."

"Yeah, but what's Sherill done?"

"Oh, he stole horses."

They circled around to the alley beside the bank, which was almost directly across from the Lazy Moon Saloon. It gave them a vantage point. Frank Eldon and Dave Farrell were in front of the saloon, and they saw Eldon cross the street, evidently coming to the bank, and intending to go through the alley and enter the rear door.

He stepped off the sidewalk and recoiled with a startled grunt, when Hashknife grabbed him with both hands.

"No noise," warned Hashknife, as the old man jerked back and lost his hat.

"Wh-wh-what is it?" asked the old man weakly.

"Don't talk."

Gently but firmly Hashknife propelled Eldon around to the back door of the jail. It was too dark for the old man to recognize them, and they locked him in a dark cell next to Sherill, who cursed them and demanded to be released. But they did not speak to him, merely snapping the lock before they closed the back door behind them.

"Good gosh, do you realize we've jailed their most prominent citizen?" asked Sleepy. "He can make it awful hot for us, Hashknife."

"You know," chuckled Hashknife, "I never figured on puttin' him in jail until he ran into us. That's what I calls a happy inspiration."

"Well, I'm glad you know what it was for—I don't. Who do we arrest next?"

"That's a question. I'd shore like to know where Silver Linin' went with his prisoners."

"I dunno. Awhile ago I seen Clare Edwards goin' down this side of the street, and I'm wonderin' if she went down to the jail."

"That's an idea. Let's go over to Farrell's house and see if she has any idea where they went. You'll have to do the talkin', 'cause she ain't so awful fond of me."

They sauntered over to Farrell's house and went through the gate. Hashknife stopped short, staring at an upper window covered by a drawn shade, which was apparently rather transparent. For several moments the silhouette of Silver Linin's profile showed plainly, before he turned away.

"Good hunch," laughed Hashknife, and they went up to the porch, where they knocked on the door.

After a short wait Mrs. Farrell opened the door a little. She was plainly nervous as she asked them what they wanted.

"Lemme speak to Silver Linin'," said Hashknife.

"Silver Linin'? Why, he's—"

"Upstairs." Hashknife smiled.

Mrs. Farrell wavered. She wanted to lie, wanted to deny that Silver Linin' was in the house; but those level gray eyes were smiling, and she nodded, stepping aside to let the two men in.

Don Shiel was halfway down the stairs, a gun in his hand. But Hashknife ignored the gun.

"Hello, Shiel," he said. "Let me speak

to Silver Linin', will you?"

Don hesitated, a determined glint in his eyes.

"We're for you," said Hashknife simply.

Don drew a deep breath, nodded his head and led the way. Clare was standing in the middle of the room, while Edna Wales sat in a rocker near Silver Linin', who was squatting on his heels. Together against the right hand wall were Hopeful and Spud.

"Keep away from that window," said Hashknife to Silver Linin'. "Your face shows plain, with this light behind it. That's how we located you."

The deputy shifted his position quickly, and Hashknife noted that he had no gun in his holster. Clare watched Hashknife defiantly.

"Did the lady stick you up, Silver Linin'?" asked Hashknife.

"She shore did—" grinning widely. "I'm a prisoner—but I like it."

Hashknife smiled at Edna Wales, and she blushed furiously.

"What do you want?" asked Don.

"Well, I'd like to make you a proposition."

"What sort?" asked Clare quickly, suspiciously.

"I want to borrow Silver Linin'."

"Borrow him?"

"Him and his gun." He turned to Clare. "I reckon you can guard your prisoners, and I shore need that deputy."

"You—you won't tell anything?" asked Clare.

"Not about you and your prisoners—no, ma'am. As a matter of fact, I admire you jist a awful lot, Miss Edwards, and I'm glad you did it. Works out jist right as far as it's gone, but there's a lot yet to come, and I need that darn deputy sheriff."

"It's all right, Clare," said Don. "I'll take the chance."

Clare nodded and Silver Linin' accepted his gun.

"I know you'd rather stay here." Hashknife grinned.

"Allus my luck," sighed Silver Linin'. "If I died and went to heaven they'd yank me out before I got m' harp tuned up."

Once outside the place Hashknife explained in a few words:

"Go down to the office, sneak in without anybody seein' you, and set down. If Rowdy comes, don't tell him a thing. You jist sit there. Keep away from the jail. If they shove a gun in your face and demand the prisoners, don't give 'em the keys. That's all you have to do."

"Well, what kind of game are you runnin'?"

"You know all you need to know. Git goin'."

"All right, all right.'

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy crossed the street and stopped in the alley between the Lazy Moon Saloon and the feed store, where they could keep watch on the jail and also on what went on in the saloon.

Things seemed quiet around the saloon, but Rowdy was not fooled. He knew that these men were not going to preface their actions with a lot of noise and confusion. Clint Reith and Parke Deal were doing a lot of wandering around, as though looking for somebody. Finally Rowdy went back to the office and asked Silver Linin' if everything was all right.

"Fine," lied the deputy. "I don't believe there is any danger."

"Jist the same we'll keep one eye open."

In the meantime Reith and Deal had halted in the shadows near a hitch rack, trying to puzzle out what had become of Sherill, whom they had sent out to locate Hashknife.

"It ain't like Jim to do a thing like that," declared Reith. "He wasn't drunk. I can't figure it out."

"Where's Hartley?" queried Deal anxiously.

As they came to the front of the saloon Farrell met them.

"Have you seen Eldon, Parke?" he asked.

"Not for quite a little while."

"This is kinda funny. He went over

to the bank to get a paper for me, and he said he'd be back in five minutes. That was quite awhile ago, and he never came back. He ain't in the bank, and I found his hat in the alley over there. I've been up to his house, but he ain't there."

"Are you sure he ain't in the bank?"

"Well, it's dark in there and the doors are locked."

Farrell went down the street, while Reith and Deal stopped on the walk in front of the saloon. Crowley sauntered out the back entrance of the saloon, and a few moments later Evarts left there and went across the street; but he whispered to Reith and Deal as he passed them.

Their casual movements meant nothing to Rowdy, who sat behind a player in a poker game. Crowley walked past the sheriff's office and saw Silver Linin' in there reading a paper. Beyond the office he stopped and was joined by Reith, Deal and Evarts. Each man covered his face with a handkerchief, and they came silently back through an alley.

Watching cautiously until there was no one in sight on the street, they suddenly surged into the sheriff's office. Silver Linin' looked up at the four guns, took a deep breath and waited. He could have named every man of the four.

"Don't move," said Crowley.

"Not me." Silver Linin' smiled.

"Give us the cell keys."

"Sorry, gents, but Rowdy's got 'em all."

"You're a damn liar!" snapped Deal nervously.

"And I'll remember that," replied the deputy coldly.

"Move ahead of us," growled Crowley, "and don't talk back."

One of the men picked up the lamp and they filed back to the cells, where the light illuminated the faces of Frank Eldon and Jim Sherill.

"What the hell's goin' on around here?" demanded Sherill, while the five men gaped at him and Eldon.

"What are you doin' in there?" asked Reith in amazement.

"Well, I'll be a liar if it ain't Mr. Eldon!" snorted the deputy.

The men crowded closer to look at the old man. Sherill cursed them for delaying his release.

"This looks bad," said Deal nervously. "What does it mean? Eldon, who put you in here?"

"I—I don't know, Parke."

"Hartley put me in, damn him!" raved Sherill.

"Hartley?" The gun shook in Deal's hand. "Why, what right—say, let's find out about this."

In their haste to get out of the jail they forgot Silver Linin'. They had planned to take the prisoners quietly, take them far out of town and then come back, notifying the rest secretly, but this was more than they had bargained for. They removed their masks as they hurried toward the Lazy Moon Saloon, while Silver Linin', chuckling foolishly, followed them.

Hashknife and Sleepy had seen the four men enter the office, but waited until they came out before making any move. Then Hashknife led the way around to the back door of the saloon, where they entered casually and stopped near the middle of the floor. There were quite a number of men in the saloon, and Hashknife felt that they were merely killing time, waiting to be notified that Don and his two men had been taken from the jail. Rowdy eyed Hashknife and Sleepy closely. With a clatter of boots, the jingle of spurs, in came the four men. The place went silent. Parke Deal stopped near Rowdy, looking at him sneeringly.

"So you moved 'em away, did you?" he grated.

"Eh?" grunted the sheriff, getting to his feet quickly. Silver Linin' had halted in the doorway.

"Say that again, will you, Deal?" asked the sheriff.

"Hell!" snorted Deal angrily.

Silver Linin' laughed aloud, bracing a shoulder against the doorway.

"I don't suppose you know your prisoners are gone, eh?" said Reith.

"Gone?" Rowdy's astonishment was genuine.

"Yeah—gone!" said Reith angrily.

"And I'd like to know why in hell you're holdin' Jim Sherill and Frank Eldon in jail."

Rowdy's jaw sagged, and he blinked foolishly at Reith.

Hashknife stepped out now and came slowly toward them. Gone was the smile from his lean face, and his gray eyes seemed mere pinpoints in the yellow light. Deal grunted softly and swayed away from the bar at sight of the tall, lean cowboy.

"Are the prisoners gone, Silver Linin'?" asked Rowdy.

"Been gone a couple hours."

"Is Don Shiel out of jail?" demanded Jim Edwards.

"Yeah, he's out and he'll stay out," said Hashknife evenly. "It was me who put Sherill and Eldon in jail. They're a crooked pair. Deal, keep your hand away from your gun, 'cause I want to tell you somethin'."

"Tell me what?" asked Deal hoarsely.

"You probably realize by this time that I wrote those two letters which brought you and Reith together here tonight."

"Are you tryin' to be funny?" asked Reith coldly.

"Funny? Not the kind of funny things you can laugh at, Reith. Next time you hair brand a long haired horse, don't forget that somebody might clip him."

Reith scowled, but not with complete understanding.

"Deal, don't scratch your hand on that gun butt. You've played the dog-in-the-manger stuff long enough. You wanted a certain girl, and you saw to it that nobody else got her. You sent Don Shiel to the penitentiary, and you planned well to get him hung this time, but—"

"You crazy fool, what do you mean?" asked Deal.

Chick Hatch came running in, stopped in the doorway and said:

"Don Shiel is down at Farrell's place! I seen—" He stopped. No one was paying any attention to him. Silver Linin' shoved him aside.

"I may be a fool, but I'm not crazy," continued Hashknife. "The clippers showed that it's awful easy to alter a Quarter Circle E to a Circle JB—and it's a cinch to change a Lazy S to a Shamrock. And that job was done before Don Shiel came back from the pen. That's why I wrote those letters—and why you both bit at my bait."

"You can't prove a thing on me, damn you!" snarled Deal.

"He's passin' the buck to you, Reith," warned Hashknife.

Reith swore softly, bitterly, as Crowley and Evarts moved aside slowly, not caring to be included. Silver Linin' eased his gun loose, his eyes on Hashknife. Sleepy had moved aside, one thumb hooked over the belt above his holster.

"Don't let him bluff you, Clint!" Deal's voice was a whisper.

"Reith owns both the Circle JB and the Shamrock," said Hashknife. "And here's somethin' for you, Deal. I left town ahead of you this afternoon, and I was in your house when you rode in. I didn't want you to see me; so I went down into your little cellar."

Deal seemed to freeze for a moment. His face went the color of wood ashes, his mouth sagged. And then, as though galvanized by an electric impulse, he flung Reith in front of him, dived into the surprised Silver Linin', and they went sprawling out across the sidewalk.

Clint Reith stumbled, drawing his gun; but Hashknife slashed him across the wrist with his gun, knocking the pistol out of Reith's hand. At the same time he tripped Reith, flinging him into the arms of the sheriff, who promptly fell upon him, pinning his arms.

Hashknife sprang outside, almost colliding with Silver Linin', who was picking himself up from the sidewalk, gasping for breath to tell them that Deal was at the hitch rack. A horse lurched away from the rack in the darkness, and Hashknife fired twice, but with little hope of a hit.

Men were running for their horses, even Crowley and Evarts going to help capture the man they had been so anxious to assist a few minutes before. Reith, half stunned, was cursing and jerking at his

handcuffs.

"I'll take care of him," offered Edwards. "Git after Deal, Rowdy."

Sleepy was swearing earnestly, but Hashknife remained calm.

"They'll never git him," wailed Sleepy. "He knows this valley better than any man around here. Doggone it, he's one we missed."

"I wonder if we have. There's one lone chance—a hunch on human nature. C'mon."

WHEN Parke Deal, realizing that the game was up with him, mounted that horse at the hitch rack, he had an idea in mind, and that idea was not a long chase into the hills ahead of a posse. He rode straight out of town for a half mile, running his horse at top speed, and then he doubled back toward town. With the start he had, it was easily done, and a few minutes after his escape, he dismounted at the corner of Farrell's fence, sprang into the yard and ran heavily to the door, jerking out his gun as he came up the steps.

Clare heard him and ran to the door. They had been anxiously waiting for news, and she thought this might be Hashknife, Sleepy or Silver Linin'. The blinds had all been drawn and the three ex-prisoners were down in the main room.

Parke Deal shoved Clare roughly aside and strode into the room. Don sprang to his feet at sight of Deal, who was hatless, one sleeve torn almost off, with a trickle of blood down one cheek. Don had been unarmed since he had returned Silver Linin's gun.

"I heard you was here," gloated Deal. "They're huntin' for me in the hills, but I fooled 'em and came back."

The door was open behind Deal. No one spoke, and the click of his gun was plain as he cocked it slowly.

"They thought they had me cold—" he laughed mirthlessly. "That damn Hashknife! I wish I had time to kill him, too. But I'll be satisfied to get you, Shiel. They'll never take me alive, and one more killin' won't make any difference. Go ahead and pray, Shiel. I killed Buck Halstead and I killed John Eldon. Hashknife guessed that, damn him! He guessed that me and Buck Halstead was misbrandin' them Edwards horses ourselves, when you and your old man came along. He guessed that I killed Buck to keep his mouth shut. He don't *know*, but—yes, damn you all, and I killed Byers. Now do you understand why I won't hesitate to kill you?"

Clare had sagged back against the wall, partly behind Deal, one hand digging into her blouse. Deal had either forgotten her or did not care.

"Don't move, Shiel," he said. "Take it like a man. Three years ago I swore you'd never marry Clare Edwards, and that still goes. I tried to kill you at that corral, but we got your father instead. I wanted to shoot you at the brandin' fire, but Buck stopped me; so we sent you to the pen instead. Buck had the liver of a chicken, and that's why I killed him. I stopped that poor fool of a John Eldon, and here's where I stop you."

Clare's hand came out of her blouse gripping a heavy Colt. Her hand was not over three feet away from Parke Deal, when two shots thundered almost at the same moment, one of them from outside the doorway.

Parke Deal's finger jerked as he was falling, and his bullet ripped a hole in the plaster just above Hopeful's head. Clare dropped her gun and covered her eyes with her hand, as Don Shiel caught her in his arms, and Hashknife stepped through the doorway, a smoking gun in his hand.

"My God, I shot him!" said Clare. "Oh, I had to, Don; I had to do it!"

Hashknife patted her on the shoulder, and she lifted her head from Don's shoulder to stare at Hashknife.

"That shore was a nervy try, Miss Edwards," he said. "To do good shootin' you ought to keep both eyes open and not jerk the trigger. I'm sorry to beat you out of a chance to carve a notch on your gun, but your bullet bored a hole in that picture over there."

Clare turned and stared at the smashed picture.

"I—I didn't hit him?" she gasped.

"Well, you made a brave try, ma'am."

"Oh, Don, I didn't shoot him! Do you hear that? I didn't do it."

"Yes, dear," said Don; but his eyes met the level gray ones of Hashknife, and they both understood.

Sleepy was bending over Parke Deal.

"Left shoulder," he said. "He'll live to stretch a rope plenty."

Jim Edwards, Dave Farrell and several other men, who had locked Reith in the jail, had heard the shots and came running. One man went to get a doctor, and in the meantime Parke Deal recovered enough to curse them all. Jim Edwards was trying to explain to Clare and Don.

"Oh, I was wrong," he admitted.

"Here's the sheriff," said some one, and in came the sheriff and deputy.

"We didn't know which way to go in the dark; so we came back," explained the flustered sheriff.

"Clare tried to shoot Deal and save me," said Don, "but she missed him."

"Somebody didn't miss him," said Silver Linin' dryly.

"That was Hartley," said Edwards.

"This looks like a Hartley evenin' all the way around," grunted Rowdy.

"With the kind assistance of Miss Edwards." Hashknife grinned.

"She stuck me up and emptied the jail," added Silver Linin'.

Parke Deal's eyes opened.

"I should have killed you," he said venomously, looking at Hashknife.

"Shore should, Deal. Folks, this here is your three ghosts."

"Where's the other two?" asked Edwards.

Hashknife laughed softly.

"They're a couple dummy riders, wired to saddles, and you'll find 'em in Deal's cellar, under the kitchen floor. Oh, it was a clever stunt to work at night and lead two horses, but it didn't take me long to find out that only one of the ghosts did anythin'. For instance, you made a bluff at kidnapin' old man Eldon, so he'd see the other two riders, and you made remarks that would cinch the job on Don Shiel."

"Dang his hide!" snorted Hopeful. "He already admitted that he murdered Buck Halstead, John Eldon and Byers."

"I knew he done the jobs." Hashknife smiled.

"But why is Frank Eldon in jail?" asked Silver Linin'.

"For makin' a foolish mistake," said Hashknife. "He held a mortgage on the Lazy S, signed by Daniel H. Shiel. I told Don about it and he made an X with his finger, indicatin' that his father couldn't sign his own name, but had to use a mark. There's no X on that record. I'm not exactly sure, but I'd make an even bet that Parke Deal had a hand in the crooked work."

"Do you know everythin'?" snarled Parke.

"Didja?" asked Rowdy.

"Well, I got five thousand for witnessin' it. If you want to know of anythin' else I done—ask Hartley."

Clare and Edna were crying on each other's shoulders, while Don and Silver Linin' grinned foolishly at each other. Hashknife and Sleepy exchanged glances, sidled out together, walking swiftly to the livery stable.

And ten minutes later, while the folks of Del Sur searched for them, they were riding down the road toward Nash, heading out of the Valley of the Lazy Moon. It was like them to slip away at a time when men wanted to thank them. There were hills to be crossed, and the finger of fate beckoned them on.

As they rode along in the starlight, chap clad knee rubbing a chap clad knee, keeping a slithering time to the soft plop of hoofs, the jingle of bridle chains, Sleepy broke the silence—

"It took quick thinkin' on your part to miss Parke Deal and sock the picture dead center, Hashknife."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"The best shot I ever made."

THE END

# *The* CZAR'S HOROSCOPE

By NATALIE B. SOKOLOFF

HIGH above the sparkling edifices of Moscow rose the gloomy tower of Daraz, the Czar's astrologer.

Sunlight, striking the barred window, fell into the vaulted chamber illuminating the serene face, the white hair and tall angular figure of the venerable sage as he bent over a large parchment. He wore the conical hat and long robe of his calling, and a black cat, purring contentedly, was rubbing its arched back against his sandaled feet. For his knowledge, embracing like that of most learned men of the time all branches of the then known science, Daraz was an alchemist of no less renown than he was an astrologer.

A battery of instruments, pertaining to the study of the stars on their course through the universe, protruded their sinister limbs here and there through the haze of vapors which, spreading from a pot boiling on the hearth, hung over the chamber. The walls were bright with cabalistic signs and covered with the dried skins of snakes, toads and lizards, and bunches of dried herbs. Several live bats of great size hung immovable and flat over the chimney.

Daraz bent lower over the parchment. He was frowning. Suddenly a gleam, cunning and malicious, shot into his eyes, veiled with age and wisdom. His claw-like finger followed the maze of intricate lines traced on the parchment which, like himself, was faded and yellowed. It was the Czar's horoscope.

Had he struck at last, after all these years, on the means of gaining his freedom? The astrologer wondered, trembling with excitement. Here, in the sign of the Unicorn, the twin stars . . . His finger followed their course as it was depicted on the parchment. Two stars.

Traveling together a long, magnificent and stately journey, nearing the line of the horizon, and setting beyond it, together. Together! But he could change that by a few additional lines. He would do it today. Right now. At once! Then a word to the Czar. A shamefaced confession that he had just discovered a mistake in the horoscope.

But here the old man, his hand on the parchment, paused in his musing. The horoscope was the work of the best years of his life, the achievement which had won him tribute and respect of the whole scientific world. Must he renounce it? And then the Czar's anger— He shrank at the thought. No matter! He would brave it all. He would plead his past youth, his inexperience. He had been too young when entrusted with the work.

"Just a little mistake, Czar. The two stars change their course toward the end. They do not set together . . ."

Shaking all over, muttering to himself incoherently, the astrologer sprang to his feet to gather the writing materials. A sudden sound, muffled by distance but terrible nonetheless, made him pause. It came from below his window, and he recognized it as the roar of the mob, collecting in the Red Square to witness an execution.

He listened to it for a moment, then straightened himself. And tall, pale, serene once more, he shook his white head, smiling his thin, wise smile. His hand was still on the old parchment and he now caressed it affectionately.

"No," he murmured. "It is best as it is. I will never change it."

Meanwhile in the square below, out of the palace overshadowed by the astrologer's tower, the Czar came out surrounded by a veritable army of guards. Resplendent in his bejeweled dress; tall, muscular, with a large cruel face and fierce eyes, he was power and tyranny personified. Yet more than once before he had reached the high chair prepared for him near the scaffold he was seen to tremble and grow deathly pale as if in terror. He was afraid of crowds, and seldom ventured abroad except, as now, to gloat over the fate of his enemies, as he called them. Obsessed by the idea that his life was in danger, he saw treason everywhere and considered himself safe only in the astrologer's tower in the company of Daraz who, as every one knew, was as anxious to prolong the Czar's life as the Czar himself.

For according to the Czar's horoscope, the two were to die on the same day. But if Daraz was eager to postpone the hour when the Czar would breathe his last, the Czar on his part did all in his power to prolong the astrologer's days. A beloved and venerated prisoner, the learned man was placed in the strongest tower of the Kremlin and thither the Czar would flee when overwhelmed by fear of assassination. And now as he took his place in the chair near the scaffold, his gaze wandered to the gloomy tower and he wished he were there, safe with Daraz, the only man he trusted.

THE condemned men began to emerge from the dungeons under the palace. The crowd pressed forward eagerly. But, good-naturedly, it let through the two beggars who were pushing their way nearer the scaffold. Men of that low station were held in high esteem in those days. One was a stocky, black haired man, the other a lean lad. Both were dressed in rags, wore sheepskin hats and carried tall staffs. Pale and trembling, the younger clutched at the elder man's arm.

"Prince," he whispered, "what if we are recognized?"

"The pledge we have given to the Cause," the prince answered in a low voice, "demands the presence of some one of us at every execution. It is the least we can do to ease the last minutes of our comrades. Remember, show no emotion or surprise. We may see any one. Last week only, Boyarin Saltukov fell thus a witness to his brother's execution. Look now, there goes Kapnist," he went on, as a man wearing the rich dress of a nobleman ascended the scaffold where the chief executioner, a giant in a red silk shirt, stood leaning on his ax. "The day before yesterday the Czar's best friend, and now— See, he sees us! He smiles. Now he is kneeling at the block. Steady, steady, Nik-

ola," he added hastily, grasping his shoulder as the lad swayed at the sight of gushing blood. "You'll ruin us all. There. That's better. Here comes Narishkin. Looks as if the Czar is bent on killing all his nobles today," he added bitterly.

The two looked on with studied unconcern.

The scaffold was flooded with blood. The mob began to murmur in discontent. Accustomed as they had become to the spectacle, this wholesale murder of innocent men was proving too much for them. And their murmur swelled in volume as some ten more prisoners were led out into the square.

"What's the matter?" the prince whispered.

He was not looking in that direction, but a muffled exclamation had escaped the lad who had espied and recognized one of the prisoners.

"Don't—don't look that way," Nikola whispered hoarsely. "Let us go. Prince, let us go, I implore you."

And seizing the prince's arm, he started to drag him away from the scaffold.

"Fool!" the prince whispered angrily. "You'll ruin us all!"

"Let us go. For God's sake. For your sake, Prince," the other pleaded, shaking with emotion.

Suddenly he let go of the prince's arm and stood beside him, strangely still, holding his breath. The prince, rigid with amazement, his eyes wide with horror, was staring at the gray haired prisoner who was now ascending the scaffold.

The mob was amazed no less than he. Last night only, the exalted position of old Boyarin Rotchinsky had seemed assured, his power unquestionable, and now they saw him laying his magnificent head for the executioner's ax. The last remaining noble to persist in shielding the people from the Czar's cruelty. With him gone, what would be their fate?

A tense stillness descended upon the sun flooded square. Silent with awe, the mob saw the head of their brave defender fall under the glittering ax.

"Prince," Nikola whispered, clutching his arm.

But the prince shook him off. His faculties returning to him, forgetful of the consequences, he gave vent to his sorrow and rage.

"O Czar!" he shouted.

There was such a terrible ring in his voice that the men nearest him shrank back in fear, while a whisper ran through the crowd that it was the young Prince Rotchinsky, the son of the executed man.

His strong frame heaving with emotion, he raised his clenched fists and shook them at the Czar, who stared at him speechless.

"O Czar!" he repeated.

And the Czar cowered under the fierce blaze of his eyes.

"So that is how you repay the men who serve you!" the prince's voice thundered through the stillness. He pointed to the scaffold. "His blood be on your head, Czar. Fear not! He will be avenged!"

And, turning abruptly and seizing Nikola's arm, he started to push his way through the crowd which, shrieking with superstitious fear, fled before him, causing such a commotion that it was in vain the soldiers rushed forth to hinder his progress. The crowd was too thick and the soldiers were still struggling desperately through it, cursing the stupidity of the populace, when the pair was already far away, out of the crowds and running madly in the direction of the gates leading to the streets. Cries followed them. Then they heard the clap of horses' hoofs. The Czar's men were starting in hot pursuit. They ran on, keeping close to the walls of the massive buildings.

"It's the end, Prince!" the lad panted as the noise behind them swelled in volume.

The Czar's palace loomed before them.

"Here," the prince cried, turning sharply into an alley between two buildings.

THE alley was deserted. They turned a corner, raced across a court and, scaling a low wall, found themselves in another alley with a bolted gate at the end. In frantic haste the prince began

to tear off his rags. The lad followed suit. Each wore underneath an artisan's dress, black shirt and breeches. Concealing the rags under some refuse in a corner, the prince pushed his companion toward a door in the wall. It swung open at his touch. They entered a chamber, the walls of which were hung with weapons. It was empty. The barred windows looked on the Red Square where all was noise and tumult now.

"Yes," Rotchinsky whispered in answer to the lad's look. "We are in the Czar's palace. Who would think of searching for us here, of all places. This is the quarters of the officers of the guard. All have been summoned into the square, no doubt," he went on. "I used to come here—"

He stopped abruptly. Some one had entered the room adjoining, a heavy tread crossing the floor. And simultaneously there came the thud of running feet and the clank of weapons in the alley outside.

"We are lost!" the lad whispered.

But the prince was already pushing him into a closet hung with armor. He had just time to pull the door shut when they heard some one entering from the adjoining chamber. Then the alley door burst open and a number of men, soldiers apparently, filed into the room.

"What's the matter?" a voice, grim with authority, demanded.

Several voices explained excitedly what had just transpired in the square.

"So you've come to look for them here, eh?" the same authoritative voice asked, coldly ironic.

"Not here, Colonel. But they were seen entering the alley leading into the marketplace. We are after them. We've been told to give you their description."

They did so quickly, then hurried out. The door banged after them.

In the silence that ensued the two men heard a bench creak as the colonel sat down. He was drumming his knuckles on the table impatiently as if waiting for something or some one. Ages seemed to have passed before again there was the sound of a door opening and some one entering with a clatter of arms.

"You are late!" The colonel's voice rang out sharply.

"There's that trouble in the square," a man's voice began defensively.

"Never mind that," the colonel interrupted him coldly. "Your duties lie in the palace, Captain. We are expecting a visitor tonight," he went on significantly. "A learned physician from Kolomna. He will enter by the north gates. The password there is 'Kolomna.' No one is to escort him on. He must proceed alone. At the door leading into the northern wing of the palace he will give the word 'power'. Again he must be let through, but given no escort, you understand. He has had his instructions. He must find his way to the door of the tower alone. There he will give the word 'astrologer'."

"Then it's the astrologer he is to visit?" The captain's voice was low with awe.

"Yes."

"He will bear some sign?"

"White cross on his right sleeve."

"And the hour, Colonel?"

"Sometime between sunset and midnight."

The two conversed awhile about the posting of guards, then left the room together.

"Quick, now," the prince whispered.

They slipped out of their hiding place and, emerging into the alley, hurried into the Red Square by the route they had come. The crowds there had dispersed, but an occasional group of the curious, whispering mysteriously among themselves, told them that the excitement caused by Rotchinsky's public abuse of the Czar was still at its height.

Dusk was setting rapidly over the ancient city. Lights began to spring up here and there along the Kremlin Wall and in the windows of the great buildings, gleaming yellow through the blue mist. The outlines of the scaffold grew indistinct in the shadows. Hooded forms were moving about it, and now and then the torches of the guards who were searching the nearby passages for the two beggars would illuminate suddenly a monk's ascetic face and a couple of his brethren carrying a stretcher—inmates of a monastery come to take the bodies of the executed men for

burial in sanctified grounds.

Nikola, on catching a glimpse of the sinister group, cast a troubled glance at the prince. But Rotchinsky's face was calm. Distorted by grief and rage an hour before, it was set now in grim determination. The lad wondered at the change.

THEY crossed the square unhurriedly, for at this hour a number of men, wearing clothes identical with their own, were to be seen about—artisans on their way home. Their appearance thus passed unnoticed. And soon they were making their way through the maze of narrow, unlighted streets winding in and out around the Kremlin. The dwellings were dark, but an occasional tavern showered light over the cobbles. They entered one. The place was crowded. Every one was discussing the incident at the execution. Prince Rotchinsky's name was on everybody's lips.

The two kept themselves well in shadow until the innkeeper, casting a quick glance in their direction, came out from behind his counter and with studied unconcern crossed to a door, disappeared behind it. They slipped in after him. In silence the host locked the door and, taking up a lighted candle, led the way up the rickety stairs.

"Have they all come?" the prince whispered.

"Yes. As usual, began to come up since sunset. Guess they're not expecting to see you, though, after what happened in the square!"

"They know already?"

"News travels fast. You've made the Czar quite ill," he went on, throwing an admiring glance at the prince. "Won't see any one, they say. Locked himself up in the astrologer's tower with his Daraz. The only man in Moscow he can trust."

Unlocking a door at the top of the stairs, the innkeeper let them through. They heard him closing it, then his step descending. The prince flung another door open and crossed the threshold. His entrance was dramatic. Some twenty men who had been sitting in the room sprang to their feet.

They were of all ages. Young lads, and men whose white beards reached to their waists. Noblemen all, their bearing and features breathed courage and audacity. An unknown and secret army of crafty men who at Rotchinsky's call had abandoned their palaces to fight the enemy who, at the moment, threatened destruction to their land, their cruel Czar. The ultimate purpose of their work had remained so far undiscussed. Too daring, too terrible it was to be breathed aloud. The news of the old Rotchinsky's execution, however, had decided them. And their eyes were stern and dark with brooding when the prince appeared suddenly on the threshold and they sprang to their feet and stood staring at him.

A silence ensued—a silence vibrating with significance.

"You are right!" Rotchinsky cried. "The hour has come to strike the final blow!"

And again there was silence while they stared at each other, cold and tense with superstitious awe.

"Impossible," an old nobleman pronounced at last, his voice a mere whisper. "Impossible," he repeated with conviction. "The Czar is surrounded by guards, always, everywhere."

"Except when in the tower with Daraz, the astrologer," the prince said quietly.

They stared at him.

Then involuntarily their eyes wandered to the window. They could see the light in the astrologer's tower shining like a dim star through the heavy clouds which hung over the city.

"Which only proves," the old nobleman declared slowly, licking his parched lips, "that the deed you have in mind is impossible. No one can enter the tower. And should any one succeed in entering, he'd have Daraz to deal with, who, as we all know, lives only as long as the Czar lives. I have seen the horoscope. Their stars travel and set together. But you have some plan," he added, eyeing the prince keenly. "What is it?"

"Yes," the others cried. "What must we do?"

"A learned physician from Kolomna is coming to Kremlin tonight. You must intercept him. You'll know him by the

white cross on his sleeve. Quick, men! Should he enter Kremlin—"

One after another, they had already slipped out of the room, using a secret panel in the wall.

The prince turned to the old nobleman.

"A physician's dress!" he cried.

In a short while, attired in the black dress and cloak of a learned physician, and wearing a large hat whose fur cast a welcome shadow over his features, Rotchinsky slipped through the panel, descended the stairs, was let out by the innkeeper, and hurried in the direction of the Kremlin.

THE torches of the guards at the gates flashed redly in the darkness. He stepped boldly into the light, gave the password and, confronting the captain, exposed the white cross sewn on his sleeve. The gate swung open. He crossed the Red Square toward the northern wing of the palace. The guards here were more numerous. But they stood aside respectfully as he threw back his cloak and without a word they let him through into the building. The gloomy hall and the maze of passages farther on were crowded with soldiers. With an assured step, Rotchinsky hurried past them. The winding stairway leading into the astrologer's tower was lined with guards. Here and there, torches flared through the gloom. And at last he stood before the door of solid oak studded with gold topped nails. A guard withdrew the heavy bolts. Rotchinsky entered a dark antechamber. He heard the bolts behind him fall into place while a voice, serene with age, inquired from the depths of the room—

"Is it you, Dulmatov?"

Light streamed in as the hangings were lifted and, framed in them, stood Daraz, the Czar's astrologer, peering at the visitor.

"Come in," he said.

But as the prince stepped into the light, the old sage, with a cry of fear, sprang back, his hand reaching toward a bell. Grasping his arm, Rotchinsky pulled him back.

"Wait," he whispered. "Can't you understand? I've come to set you free."

Astonished, the astrologer ceased to struggle.

"Who are you?" he stammered.

A groan and a sigh, coming from beyond the curtains which overhung the arch leading into the adjoining chamber, made them spring apart hastily. They stared at each other with misgiving, then in the direction of the sound with apprehension.

The sigh was followed by the Czar's voice asking—

"Who is it, Daraz?"

The eyes of the prince and the astrologer met.

Daraz wavered, hesitated, then he said with studied composure.

"It is Dulmatov, Czar. The learned physician whom you had summoned to assist me in making the draft for you."

Rigid, they waited. But all was silence behind the curtain.

"He's fallen asleep again," Daraz whispered.

Motioning Rotchinsky to follow, he crossed to the hearth. With a long spoon he began to stir the contents of the pot boiling on the tripod. The odorous vapors hung over the chamber in a mist. There was no light, save from the red glow of the coals. The black cat, springing out of the shadows, approached the astrologer and started to rub its arched back against his ankles.

"Who are you?" Daraz repeated.

The prince named himself.

"The old Boyarin Rotchinsky—?" the astrologer began.

"I am his son," the prince said quietly.

Understanding flashed into the old man's eyes.

"And so you come to me," he whispered, "that I—"

He laughed a little, incredulous, astonished.

"The Czar's horoscope," he said dramatically.

"A lie," the prince said. "My father was your friend, years ago, and he knew, and he told me. You and the Czar to die on the same day! The stars did not tell you that. It was your invention to prevent the Czar from killing you as he had killed your predecessors who had happened to displease him. It was—"

Pale and trembling, the astrologer clutched at his arm.

"For God's sake," he stammered. "Silence—not another word!" Then, regaining his composure, "I would have done it, this deed you have in mind, long ago had I not feared for my soul's salvation," he remarked simply. "But I, the Czar's murderer! Never. Never!" he repeated with finality.

Bending over the pot, he went on stirring its contents serenely. Close to him, Rotchinsky gripped his shoulder.

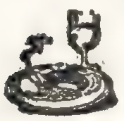
"But suppose," he whispered, "the Czar's food should be poisoned?"

"The Czar's food bearer tastes everything before it is brought into this room," the astrologer answered him coldly.

"I said suppose," the prince repeated significantly. "Suppose it should be poisoned and you, ignorant of the fact, should give it to the Czar and he died. Would you in that case consider yourself his murderer?"

"Certainly not!"

And, surprised by the prince's sudden silence, the astrologer raised his head. Their eyes met.



THERE was the sound of bolts being withdrawn, and in another second a man, resplendent in the black and gold dress of the Czar's food bearer, entered, bearing a tray laden with dishes. Placing it on a bench, he cast an awed glance in their direction and at once withdrew. As the door closed upon him the prince, his hand on one of the jars which littered the table nearby, remarked with polite interest:

"I was wondering about this. What is it? Looks like sand to me."

"Used in making sleeping powder," the astrologer replied.

He was on his guard.

"And this?" Rotchinsky went on, touching another jar.

Daraz licked his parched lips.

"Poison," he whispered. "Instantaneous, almost."

He walked over to the window and stood motionless, his back to the room.

Rotchinsky was all action at once.

Removing the pot from the tripod, he emptied its contents into a cup of solid gold, which he then placed in a shallow pan filled with cracked ice to cool. Then he secured the poison, dipped a spoon into it and deposited a few drops of the brown liquid in the cup. The Czar's supper tray was at his elbow and his eyes fell on the crystal goblet, ruddy with wine, which stood beside the steaming plate. He cast a swift glance at the astrologer, but the old sage stood motionless, his back to the room. Dipping the spoon into the jar once more, Rotchinsky quickly deposited a few drops of the brown liquid in the Czar's goblet on the tray.

"If the potion in the draft proves inadequate," he muttered to himself grimly, "this in the wine will do the work."

He paused, rigid, as there came from behind the curtains the sound of the Czar stirring in his great bed.

"Is the draft ready, Daraz?" the Czar asked sleepily.

"Almost, Czar," the prince answered, for the astrologer remained silent.

"Oh, it's you, Dulmatov," the Czar said. "How long you are about it! Is it coming out all right?"

"It is ready," Rotchinsky announced, closing the jar and placing it back on the table. "Daraz will bring it to you with your supper."

His words roused the old sage out of his stupor and swiftly he came toward him. Rotchinsky took the draft cup out of the ice and, holding it in his hand, turned to face the astrologer. The eyes of the two men met. The prince handed him the cup. The astrologer took it and, carrying it in one hand and the tray in the other, disappeared into the Czar's chamber. The prince folded his arms and listened.

"The draft, Czar," Daraz's voice said.

Silence.

"The taste is sweet," the Czar's voice declared approvingly.

Again silence. Minutes passed. Then the astrologer reappeared, carrying the tray. His hands shook as he placed it on the table.

"He is dead," he said quietly.

"Are you sure?"

Daraz nodded. He seemed in a daze.

"The Czar is dead," he stammered. "He drank the draft and—and then he

began to eat his soup and—then he died. As if in his sleep. The poison leaves no marks. There will be no suspicion."

Rotchinsky pulled at the bell frantically. To the soldiers who burst into the room he announced the news and added—

"Call the officers, the boyars, the high priest."

"The high priest," the astrologer repeated. "Rotchinsky, I don't want to see him. He has always been my enemy. He never believed in my work. He laughed at my prophecies, at the horoscope. He will see me living while the Czar is dead. He will laugh at me. Hide me, Rotchinsky."

"But you are free now," the prince reminded him. "You can go away, leave the tower, at once."

"Free!" Daraz repeated.

It seemed as if only now the truth of it dawned on him. His eyes began to sparkle.

The tower by now had been thrown into a tumult as the news spread. From behind the curtains came the murmur of the soldiers praying at the Czar's deathbed. Guards with flaming torches were running in and out of the room. But the old sage seemed unaware of it all. He resembled a madman in his wild delight.

"Free, you say," he repeated in a hoarse whisper. "Free!"

Seizing the prince's arm, he dragged him to the window.

"Look," he cried. "See that road? The sun is just rising—"

The sun indeed was just rising, and across the cupolas and spires of the city, glittering in the rosy light at their feet, Rotchinsky discerned a road, winding among the fields far away.

"See it?" cried Daraz. "How many times during all these years, a prisoner, I've imagined myself hurrying along that road! Away from Moscow, from the Czar, from this accursed tower to some place where I would live, a free man. And now at last!" Tears were running down his haggard face. "At last I will journey along it. My own master. To do what I like. Say what I like. Drink what I like—"

His blazing eyes swept the room as if in search of something on which he could test his suddenly acquired freedom. The Czar's tray was still standing on the table. He ran to it, seized the goblet full of wine, raised it.

"Wait!" Rotchinsky cried.

But the astrologer had already emptied it at a gulp and he now set it down, laughing joyously. His eyes sparkled. He went on talking animatedly. Then suddenly he was silent. His hand clutched at the table for support. A look of horror had come into his eyes.

"It can not be," he murmured. "No—it can not be that! It's the excitement. Rotchinsky," he appealed to the prince, "you know it can not be *that*. Because the Czar is dead it does not follow that I— The horoscope was a lie! Rotchinsky!" he cried, frantic with despair and terror. "Why don't you say something?"

"That wine you drank," the prince said quietly, "was poisoned . . . "

He ran to him. The astrologer sank to the floor. He was dead.

More soldiers were entering the chamber and behind them came the head priest in his golden robes, followed by a group of boyars and superior officers.

"The Czar—?" the priest began.

Then his eyes fell on the astrologer's lifeless form. He crossed himself slowly. The others removed their hats and stood with bowed heads, silent.

"Verily, Daraz was a man of great learning," the priest said, his voice low pitched with awe. "His greatest prophecy came true."

# The CAMP-FIRE

*A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers*

IN CONNECTION with his story, "Moon Jade", in this issue, Sidney Herschel Small sends in the appended note:

San Rafael, California

When F'i Leung in "Moon Jade" remarks that the rose-quartz snuff bottle is "hardly mandarin color" he is expressing the common idea about the importance of jade to the exclusion of other gems in China. As a matter of fact, the mandarins attached the following importance to gems, and wore them as designating their rank:

1st rank: ruby, red tourmaline
2nd rank: coral
3rd rank: beryl or lapis
4th rank: rock crystal
5th rank: other white stones

Nevertheless, jade seems the one gem we think about when China is mentioned. As a matter of fact, Chalfant, in "Early Chinese Writings", finds the symbol of jade beads in one of the earliest Chinese characters. Their oldest ideograph for "king" is a string of jade beads.

Jade comes in all colors from white to a rich blue-green—this last known as "kingfisher" or "Imperial" jade. The Webster dictionary calls it "blue-green"; their Chinese expert must have been confused by the Chinese word *feits'ui*, which means "kingfisher plumes" by every authority I've ever found.

JADE amulets were and are exceedingly popular with Chinese. One, representing two men, is called "Brothers of Heavenly Love" and is often given to two friends. (Some years ago I saw a tongman hanged—as an assignment and not because I wanted to be there—and he had been permitted to retain his Brothers amulet. I often wondered who had the other one, because the only man who visited him was one of the most important merchants in Chinatown!) Newly married Chinese of the better class are often presented with a little jade figure of a man riding a unicorn and holding castanets, or perhaps chopsticks, in his hand. This assures that an heir will be born. Chinese bridegrooms give their fiancées a tiny jade butterfly. There are a host of other superstitions and folk lore governing the stone.

The jade urn mentioned in the story, you can call it by a host of names: Tomb jade. Silver jade. Moon jade. Smaller bits are commonly called *han yü*, or mouth jade, because these amulets were placed in the mouths of the dead.

Most tomb jades are not especially lovely in color, since they generally acquire a brownish shade—especially the mouth jades. But the urn in the story isn't fictitious; I saw it. It is in the shop of Mr. Nathan Bentz in San Francisco, and the price *paid* for it was $45,000—gold. That doesn't include duty nor anything else. It is an enormous block of pure white jade, colored silver and goldish in long lines, and no two experts agree as to the age.

THERE is also the magnificent collection of jade, the Woodward Collection, which I've never seen. In it is the famous Jade Mountain, the largest piece of carved jade in existence.

For many years the fact that there were jade ornaments found in Europe and South America (before the Spanish Conquest) was taken as almost positive proof, since prehistoric jade appeared to have its origin in Asia, that there was an Asiatic origin for even early American civilization. However, this has been exploded; a huge block of jade has been found in Silesia, and nephrite has been discovered in Alaska. Khotan in Turkistan was the chief early source of the stone.

The name we call it has an interesting origin. Rather than the Chinese name, or the New World "*chalchihuitl*", we've accepted a variation of the name given by the Conquistadores. The present name is derived from "*piedra de hijada*", or literally "stone of the flank". The Indians wore it there for curative reasons, as proved in writing by Sir Walter Raleigh's: "These Amazones . . . recover . . . a kinde of greene stone which the Spaniards call Piedras Hijadas."

The jade of commerce, set in soft pure gold bought at the San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank, is jade well enough—good jade, probably. But it's only a very thin slice of it. Fine jade, proper in color and weight, doesn't go begging. Price depends on color, carving, and history. Tourists usually wonder if they did really buy jade, and nine times out of ten they have.

—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

SOME correspondence on a bad actor from down South America:

Lead, South Dakota

I never miss one of Arthur O. Friel's stories. I thoroughly enjoy them. In "The Red Skull" he describes the attack of the snake called "the dark dalle". The study of serpents is one of my fads and I have quite an extensive reptile bibliography. I have searched in vain for any such snake as the dark dalle. I assume it is a local name for one of the South American poisonous species. Will you kindly ascertain from Mr. Friel the real name of this reptile?

—CHAMBERS KELLAR

Here is what Mr. Friel has to say:

Brooklyn, New York

I wish I could give you complete information about that ugly cuss, the dalle snake. To be truthful, I'm not even sure that I spell his name right. As for his family, I wish I knew what it is. But nobody seems to know. He may be peculiar to that particular locality. I myself have never heard of him elsewhere than in those Guayana mountains between Venezuela and Brazil. And even there he is not common.

He is a bluish-black snake with black patches along his back; medium-sized (so far as I know); extremely venomous, savage, more than willing to chase a man and strike him. The Indians fear him more than any other snake, including the huge bushmaster, or surucucu. He is not a bushmaster; he is not a coral; he is not a rattler, nor a jararaca—at least, I don't think so. He may possibly be a variant of the jararaca, or more possibly of the jararacucu (an ugly devil) or of some other viperine family. But *quién sabe?* I don't. Nor do I know any one who does. His coloration and his habitat seem to put him out of those families and in a class by himself.

HIS name, as pronounced in the back bush where he lives, varies from dah-ya to dye (English pronunciation). In attempting to turn this Venezuelan vernacular into a Spanish word which really exists I have made it dalle (approximate Spanish pronunciation dahlyay) which means scythe or sickle. This may or may not be correct, but it sort of fits. In dull coloration and ability to cut down what he swings at, this fellow can match the name. And, in the absence of any authority to the contrary, I think I'll stick by my spelling.

So that's about all I can tell you about this assassin, and I realize that it's not much. I also realize that perhaps I really ought to have brought back to the States a skin or two of this and other snakes I've seen down yonder, and specimens of many other things besides, for study and possible classification by scientists. However, it's virtually impossible for a man to load himself up with such stuff and still travel light; and if he doesn't travel light in such rough country he will soon cease traveling. Moreover, anything dead rapidly rots down there, and there are enough stinks in the jungle without adding that of decomposing snake skins to your pack. Therefore, until some chap more studious than I gives Señor Dalle the third degree and makes him tell who he is, I shall know no more about him. I'm satisfied to recognize him as bad medicine and to blow off his poison bottle at sight.

—ARTHUR O. FRIEL

A MODERN mariner in ancient guise. A reader tells of the proposed voyage of a new *Santa Maria*, reproduced after Columbus's flagship, to these shores.

Turin, Italy

Some little time ago, while passing through Madrid, Spain, I ran across a man who in the quietest way is preparing to pull one of the sportingest stunts I have heard of for a long time. He is a young Spanish naval officer with historical tastes who, in addition to his regular

duties, has been appointed director of the Naval Museum in Madrid, a fascinating institution practically unknown to travelers and deserving much more attention than it receives.

This gentleman has constructed a full-sized reproduction of Columbus's ship, the *Santa Maria*, and he plans during the coming August to sail her to America. He will follow Columbus's original route and—here's where the sporting side of the venture especially appears—he will do so under Columbus's actual conditions. He will carry a compass, but no charts, sextant or chronometer, nor any other of the modern aids to navigation. He will navigate solely by compass and astrolabe. His crew, needless to say, will be volunteers (no applications wanted, for he already has more than he can use), and they will live on bully beef and ship's biscuit, for there will be no regular galley on board.

After reaching Cuba he intends to sail up the coast and, if possible, work through the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi to the Gulf, using, of course, tows and portages where necessary. The ship has the following dimensions: mast tip to water line, 26 meters; over-all length, 28m. draft, 2.20m. beam, 8m.

—THOMAS T. HOOPES

A READER'S letter raising a couple of points on logging terminology:

South Bend, Washington

I have been an *Adventure* reader for a long time and have read many other magazines also, but during that time have not read a story of Northwest logging camps as near perfection as "Paddy the Devil," by James Stevens. I have worked in several Gray's Harbor camps, so the story appeals to me. Let's have more of them. But there are two minor errors—with all due respect for the genius of the author of "Paul Bunyan": "Chokers" are never spoken of as "ropes". Ropes in the woods are manila or hemp; steel cable is "line", "main line", "straw line", etc.

The second error is that Mr. Stevens speaks of the rope on Paddy's safety-belt being fastened to hooks on the belt. I have seen some very expert riggers, or "climbers", at work and have yet to see them have hooks on their belts. They used only rings, it seems to me. Hooks would not be safe, but perhaps they do or did use hooks some place, so we'll let it pass if Stevens will give us another of his logging yarns. —O. B. GERMOND

## Mr. Stevens' reply to the above:

Detroit, Michigan

Thanks very much for your friendly letter. Praise from a working logger for such a story as "Paddy the Devil" is praise indeed. And your exceptions to the two technical details are well taken, though my experience disagrees with yours in regard to the significance of the term "rope", as it is used in the North Pacific woods. The trade name for the hemp-center steel cable which is used, in various sizes, for main, straw, haulback, guy lines, etc., is "wire rope." The word "choker" needs no explanation to a logger. I added "rope" to make the picture clear to my general readers without burdensome explanation. And it is true that camp blacksmiths in the time of Paddy the Devil called the wire rope for making chokers "choker rope." It has also been my experience that tidewater loggers, like sailors, call hemp ropes "lines." In the pine country east of the cascades they are "ropes." Every logging district has its own terms. I'd say we were both right about ropes.

You are correct beyond dispute in your statement about rings being standard equipment in riggers' safety belts. But Paddy the Devil was a high-climber in 1910, when ground-lead logging was the rule. All logging equipment of that period has become obsolete. I wrote from memory, which may have slipped on the matter of safety-belt hooks. Yet I'm still positive that the Columbia River rigger of 1910 whom I most particularly remember hooked his climbing rope instead of tying it through rings. I'm writing to S. H. Holbrook of the *4L Lumber News* for complete information. In the meanwhile, thanks again for your letter, and best wishes till the last gut hammer rings. —JAMES STEVENS

*OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstances.*

*If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.*

# Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

## Africa

THE payroll of a hunting expedition.

*Request:*—"What is the pay of a white guide in the neighborhood of Boma or Matidi? Of native carriers?" —J. O'BRIEN, Bronx, New York

*Reply,* by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—The pay of a white guide and hunter ranges all through Africa from Sterling 50 to 150 per month and found, including horse, mule or donkey, while the porters are allowed their food (1½ lb. of mealies a day) plus from Sterling 1½ to 3 a month, except gunbearers, who get as much as Sterling 5 according to experience and reputation.

## Gold

NOTES for prospectors.

*Request:*—"Two of us, both students of Carnegie Tech, are interested in prospecting in the British Columbia district of the Rocky Mountains. We are both mineralogy students, but are greenhorns in the matter of practical mining. What equipment should we take along?"

—ELMER NAGY, West View, Pennsylvania

*Reply,* by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Have a large pick and shovel and a *small* goldpan (not over 12-inch and bit less if possible); also a 4-lb. miner's striking hammer for cracking rock, a *good* magnifying glass, a small mortar and pestle for grinding up quartz samples to pan, also perhaps a small bottle of mercury for extracting gold from possible placer. Don't burden yourselves at first with *working* tools. If you make a hit, you must come out to record anyway and can then get tools to develop. The thing is first to find the gold, lode or placer; if you do that, your first trip is a success and you can take it easy thereafter getting to work. No one can take it away from you, or jump it.

## Coconut Palm

A TREE which probably originated in the Western hemisphere.

*Request:*—"1. Are the coconut trees of the West Indies the same as those on the islands of the South Pacific? 2. Were coconut trees on the West Indian islands at the time of their discovery?" —HENRY W. VOLZ, Phoenix, Arizona

*Reply,* by Mr. Wm. R. Barbour:—1. It has long been a disputed point whether the coconut palm originated in tropical America or in the South Seas. Most authorities now agree however that this palm is of American origin. The nuts will stand months of immersion in salt water, and it is believed drifted on ocean currents westward from South America. The trees are now found throughout the tropics of the world.

2. Yes, I believe that coconut palms were on the islands when Columbus discovered them.

## Brunswick Stew

THIS barbecue side-dish from old Alabama will serve thirty people.

*Request:*—"I would like to know the recipe for a Brunswick Stew, which I am told is always served with a barbecue in the South."

—WILLIAM G. BEISWENGER, Croton, New York

*Reply,* by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—Brunswick Stew frequently accompanies barbecue in the South, but not always, for it has in itself all necessary for a full meal. The meat base for it is usually squirrels, though any other game will do, and in the following receipe, which comes to me from southern Alabama, chicken is used:

Two chickens (grown), six pounds fresh pork (streaked side is better), three pints tomatoes, three pints corn, six red and six green peppers,

one pint onions, one and half loaves bread, one pound butter, two-thirds cup vinegar, red and black pepper to taste.

Cook chicken and pork tender, cool, grind and put back in pot in broth. Grind tomatoes, corn, peppers, onions—add to meat and cook until thick, then add bread (ground) and butter, vinegar and pepper. Cook a little longer. Will serve thirty people.

Here is another which we make at my home, and which to my own mind is a little the better:

Three squirrels, quart tomatoes, pint green butter beans, pint corn, pint and half potatoes, boiled and sliced, ½ lb. butter, ½ lb. salt pork, teaspoon pepper, salt, one onion, diced.

Parboil the squirrels, then put them in about a gallon of boiling water, with the tomatoes, corn, beans, pork, onions, salt and pepper. Let stew over a slow fire for about three hours until it thickens. Add the butter, cut into small bits, let stew a few minutes longer, and serve hot.

Properly prepared, this is a dish fit for the gods, and a fellow is tempted to eat and eat until his figure assumes an unwonted rotundity, and his eye-balls "bug out."

## Wrestler

UNHAMPERED by rules, he can defeat a boxer.

*Request:*—"1. Is a physically fit man of thirty-eight too old to take up amateur wrestling? 2. I have always believed that, in the art of self-defense, wrestling is more important than boxing. What do you think?"

—LEWIS O. BARTON, Clifton, Texas

*Reply,* by Mr. Charles B. Cranford:—1. No. 2. I share your opinion regarding the advantage of wrestling over boxing for self-defense. The wrestler can feint and if necessary take a couple of blows without hurting himself until he gets into his man, who may be an excellent boxer. He has the advantage then, and can apply holds which will make the boxer lose or suffer pain and broken bones.

Of course, in amateur wrestling the punishing holds are barred, but the wrestler develops speed, endurance, wide knowledge of holds, and good physical condition.

## Samoa

WHERE New Zealand is our neighbor and the policemen are known as Fita Fita.

*Request:*—"Who has charge of the Fita Fita guard of Samoa? Are there any American members?" —JAMES F. RYAN, Baltimore Maryland

*Reply,* by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—The term Fita Fita as used in Samoa means soldier or guard. We would call him a policeman. The Samoans are the rank and file of the Fita Fita. Natives may be noncoms, but the commissioned officers are American. The Fita Fita serve on the river gunboat or on shore. Pago Pago has been an American Naval station these 30 years. There was a cut-up of the Samoan group, U. S. A. taking the Eastern islands and Germany the Western. With the coming of the Great War a contingent of New Zealanders went over to Apia and captured the Western group of the Samoas from Germany, and New Zealand today holds the mandate from the League of Nations and is now America's neighbor. With the exception of a scrimmage about a dozen years ago, the Fita Fita have had no fighting on the American group. A minor rebellion was started in Eastern Samoa by a renegade white and a halfcaste. Uncle Sam sent along a couple of warships and the trouble was disposed of. Actually, there has been no major disturbance since U. S. A. took over the group.

## Harmonica

REALLY an outdoor instrument, ideal for solacing the adventurer on a lonely anchorage or in the hidden wilderness.

*Request:*—"I am very much interested in a musical instrument, and have always listened to this music whenever possible. The harmonica is the instrument. I have tried to play it many, many times, to no avail. Perhaps you can tell me how to get started on it."

—DONALD M. HARVEY, Pensacola, Florida

*Reply,* by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—I used to play the French harp or harmonica a lot, floating in a river skiff, tramping through the woods, sitting by my camp-fire at night. The solace of the little Æolian strains is one of the joys of the lonely anchorage and the hidden wilderness retreat. I most heartily sympathize with your longing for the skill, or knack, to bring from the reeds, "Home, Sweet Home," "The Campbells Are Coming," "Money Musk," "Round Town Gals," "Chase the Squirrel" and all those folk tunes which are among the most touching and inspiring inheritance out of the Frontier days and from across the seas.

There are little instruction booklets, which you can obtain in music stores and through merchants who handle the M. Hohner harmonicas. In my own case I simply went to work on tunes that I could whistle. I took "Be it ever-r so humble" and hunted for the notes on the reeds—a C instrument first. Some tunes can't be played except on instruments of the letter in which they are written. Perhaps if you had a *single reed* (one intake, one out-blow) type of instrument, you would be able to make it. One of the best radio entertainers on the Coast leads orchestras with a French harp spanning one octave—less than two inches long.

Working on one of these tiny fellows you'll probably find in its simplicity the answer to your difficulty. Instead of trying to play a whole piece, learn one bar, containing the melody—dominant theme—of the piece, refrains of which are repeated over and over again. In the "Blue Danube Waltz," you'll catch the melody coming again and again, *One*-two-three, One-two-three! Once you get one measure, you can build on it till you can play the whole piece—or as much as you know of it. Lots of times I found I was trying to play tunes I didn't know! The results were disappointing.

**THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE** is free, provided self-addressed envelop and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

**Send** each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

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**State Police** FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

**Federal Investigative Activities** *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police** PATRICK LEE, 189-16 Thirty-seventh Avenue, Flushing, New York.

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**Dogs** JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

**American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal** *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

**Taxidermy** SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

**Entomology** *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

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**Ornithology** *Birds; their habits and distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

**Stamps** H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

**Coins and Medals** HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

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**Swimming** LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

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